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PROVIDENCE AND PRAYER: A WHITEHEADIAN
INTERPRETATION OF MARTIN LUTHER

A Dissertation
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by
Luther Paul Dale
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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

An important problem for contemporary Christian ministry is the meaningfulness of prayer. Historically, prayer has been a central ingredient in developing spiritual discipline, awareness and vitality among the leaders of the church. Prayer expressed the deepest concerns of men and was believed to be a powerful force in the world. It enabled ministers to be open to the leading of God as he made manifest his will for the world. Intercessory prayer heightened the sense of living openness to and concern for others. It made possible commitment to causes beyond the self. Deep inward spiritual insight flowed from prayer. Today, however, these past aspects of prayer are no longer self-evident. Many ministers question whether prayer any longer has usefulness. Even if the usefulness is affirmed, there is confusion as to how God's activity and prayer are related. Prayer has been grounded by the Christian belief in God's providence.

God's activity among men has been a central belief in the history of Christian faith. Christians since the origins of Christianity have tried to express their sense that God is active in human history and in individual Christian lives. The centrality of this is no less

important in contemporary Christianity. For contemporary religious consciousness and theological reflection, the sense of God's activity in the affairs of men is problematical. The affirmation that God is present and active is not self-evident, for man seems to possess a diminished sense that God is in the world. This has in turn tended to undermine the meaningfulness of prayer.

This dissertation will address itself to one aspect of this problem. We will discuss the notions of providence and prayer as they illustrate the problem of speaking about God working among men. Specifically, we will use the thought of Martin Luther and Alfred North Whitehead as illustrative of some of the problems and potential solutions that cluster about the sense and expression of providence and prayer, especially as it applies to ministry.

Thesis Statement

Our thesis is that while Luther expressed a strong religious sense that God was deeply involved in the world, this was in tension with the theological formulations about God which he inherited from the scholastics; i.e., the tension between the absolute God and his provident, loving activity. We will show that this tension can be relieved when God's providence is set within a Whiteheadian context. We will show that the religious meaningfulness of prayer, as Luther expressed it, is fulfilled when it is set within the

Whiteheadian context of God's providence. Finally, we will show how prayer can be meaningful for ministers.

The dissertation will develop in the following way. Chapter 1 will discuss the notion of providence as it has functioned in the Christian tradition. We will make an operational definition that will be used in evaluating its expression in Luther and Whitehead.

Chapter 2 will discuss the function of providence in Martin Luther. We will discuss the main thrust of his theology, especially in his concern that God be the God who guarantees salvation. We will see how his theological formulations of the all-powerful God share much in common with scholastic theology, and that this tends to undermine his religious sense of God's providential activity.

Chapter 3 will discuss Whitehead's understanding that God is metaphysically related to the world in a meaningful way, and what this implies for the Christian notion of providence. We will then discuss how the Whiteheadian context provides a way of speaking of God that preserves Luther's religious intentions about God's providential activity.

Chapter 4 will discuss Luther's understanding of prayer and the tension between his received theology and the efficacy of prayer. We will use the Whiteheadian context as a way to alleviate this tension, and to further develop Luther's understanding of prayer.

Finally, Chapter 5 will briefly consider the implications of prayer for professional ministry and end with a summary of the dissertation.

Definition of Providence

The notion of the providence of God is a central one in the history of Christian practice and theology. God's providence lies at the heart of the Christian affirmation that God is a living person who is actively at work in this world creating and sustaining all that is. It has been the basis for the confidence Christians have displayed through centuries when facing the powers and principalities of this world. Faith in God's active presence among man and creation has been an anchor of transcendent hope and confidence that in the end God and his people will prevail. Paul's affirmation in Romans 8:28, 31 "that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose . . . If God is for us, who is against us?" characterizes this sense of Christian confidence and hope. In fact it may be said that for Christians the notion of providence is the key to an understanding of the meaning of God himself. God is active in the world because of his deep love for the world which he created and still sustains.

The idea of God's providential activity in the world has had a long, complex and checkered history. Tracing the history of its development goes beyond the scope

of this paper though one can find several works which touch upon this historical question.¹ We will be content with making a few systematic summaries of the way it has functioned in Christian thought. The Biblical witness regarding the notion of God's providential activity is multifarious and confused, though general statements can be made about the overall meaning and function.²

Of course the Bible does not systematize such concepts as providence because the Bible is a confessional document about man's experience with Yahweh and with the God revealed in Jesus Christ. It was the early church fathers who had to come to terms with expressing the confessional, existential witness in a hostile, and mainly Hellenistically influenced historical matrix. Nor were the issues surrounding God's providential activity in his world ever settled in any final sense. Theological formulations continue to this day to express the Christian sense of God's presence among men.

It is not surprising, then, that when one approaches the question of God's providence systematically, the task of defining its meaning in precise terms is an enormous one. The terminology used to describe this experience of

¹Albert C. Outler, Who Trusts in God (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968).

²Maurice Wiles (ed.) Providence (London: S.P.C.K., 1969).

Christian faith is widely divergent. Upon examining the various ways providence has been expressed, one discovers a whole constellation of terms clustered about it. One discovers terms such as the following used to describe providence: Will of God, love, care, direction, guidance, presence, efficaciousness, governance, plan, foresight, pre-destination, foreknowledge, sovereignty, divine ordering, preservation, creation, moral government, purpose rule, grace, intervention, benevolence, trustworthiness. Such a plethora of terms indicates that it is not an easy task to formulate an operational definition against which to evaluate whether what is being considered regarding God and his being and work is providential. The word is at once so general in its purview and so seldom defined and used with precise specificity.

Nevertheless, it is incumbent on us that we try to ferret out from the plethora of terms a definition which is general enough to include them all, yet precise enough to provide a focus in evaluating its use within various theological frameworks. So at the risk of being too general on the one hand, so as to be meaningless, and too specific on the other, so as to exclude certain clusters of meaning which have functioned historically, we will try to define it in manageable terms and then explicate briefly what meanings are intended.

This paper will define providence as God's

relationship to the world as efficacious love, the source of order and novelty. The fundamental Christian intuition about God has been that he is related to nature and history. Beginning with the Old Testament sense of Yahweh as Lord of history, God has been related to the world. In the New Testament we find the perception that God is so related to the world that he stunningly manifests Himself in a man, Jesus of Nazareth. In Paul's writings is the recurring theme of God as creator and sustainer, expressed in passages such as Romans 8:31f.³ The Church fathers also express this profound sense of God's relatedness to the world, often in response to theologies such as that of Marcion and the Gnostics which would sever this relationship.⁴ It reaches new heights in the theology of Martin Luther, which we will consider more in detail later in this chapter. In spite of the different philosophical notions put in the harness, and the various theological starting points, God, for Christian faith, is a God related to the world he made, which was very good.⁵

This relationship is characterized as one of efficacious love. The word efficacious is employed consciously. No matter how it is expressed, the Christian

³Outler, p. 17; Wiles, p. 17.

⁴Outler, p. 33.

⁵Outler, p. 72.

vision of God's providence has been one that relates him to the world in an active way. The Christian God is not a disinterested observer of creation (though it may sound that way in various theologies). He is intimately involved in creating anew the world he created. Such terms as "care, direction, omnipotence, will, guidance, governance, preservation" listed earlier cluster about this experience and intuition. The Christian God is active, related, at work, making a difference, influencing. This sense of activity stands in the background of the terms mentioned above. A God who is related is also a God at work.

The term love used to describe God's providence needs little justification. If the Christian God is anything at all, he is a God of love. The Biblical witness reeks with the witness of faith that God is love. Paul especially proclaims this theme in such passages as found in Romans chapter 8. God's love for man is evidenced, for Paul, in the death and resurrection of Jesus who died that men might have life. The Sunday school song, which puts this simply is, "Jesus Loves Me," which expresses that we belong to him and are weak compared to his strength. God's active relationship is one of love and this certainly is at the core of Christian soteriology.

The terms order and novelty are used to express in more specificity the sense that God is the creator and sustainer of the world. Without God the world would fall

into chaos; in fact, it would cease to exist. It is his purposive activity which keeps nature and history from flying into oblivion. God is not understood as a once-and-for-all creator. His creative activity never ceases and thus he is the source of freshness, newness, growth, novelty which is experienced. God is the continuing Creator, the source of order and novelty.

"God's relationship to the world as efficacious love, the source of novelty and order" will thus function for us as an operational definition which we shall use in evaluating the notion of providence in the thought of Martin Luther (Chapter 2) and in process theology, principally, Alfred North Whitehead (Chapter 3). It will also be used in evaluating the meaning and use of prayer as a vehicle to deepen one's sense of God's relationship to and activity among Christians (Chapter 4) and ministers (Chapter 5).

Next, then, let us try to understand the theology of Martin Luther with the question of God's providence in mind to see how this notion functions for a classical theist.

Chapter 2

LUTHER AND PROVIDENCE

Purpose of Chapter

The aim of this chapter is to outline the basic thrust of Luther's theology as it expresses the meaning of God and his providence. Because the starting point and main intention of Luther is soteriological, i.e., man's relationships before God (coram Deo) providence will be shaped within that context. The basic thesis is that Luther's theological concern to speak about a God who is related to men in saving activity (providence) is in tension with a medieval doctrine of God which makes such a relationship contradictory. Further, his antagonism to metaphysical speculation about God is attenuated when it is understood that that antagonism is more against the scholastic view of faith in relation to God, rather than against discussion of God per se; and that in fact he has a great deal more to say about God and his activity than his seeming antagonism to metaphysical speculation about God would allow. This opens the way to assess the tension between his hidden assumptions about God and his providential activity. Then, in the following chapter, we will consider a view of God that makes sense of the way we have operationally defined providence

and that preserves the insights of Luther.

The discussion of Luther will include only the concepts that are most germane to an understanding of God and his relationship to man. It will exclude, of course, great portions of his theological reflection that do not bear directly on this consideration. The remainder of the chapter will develop in the following manner. We will first consider Luther's personal and historical matrix taking account of those features of scholastic theology against which Luther reacted. Secondly, we will sketch the main aim and theme of Luther's theology that emerged from his reaction. Thirdly, we will develop his view of reason and speculative metaphysics that is a direct by-product of his encounter with scholastic theology and which so profoundly shaped his theological methodology. Fourthly, we will deal with Luther's understanding of man's will in relationship to God, a view shaped by his view of the inability of man's reason to approach and understand God and salvation. Fifthly, we will draw together the various implications of the previous discussion regarding Luther's view of the hidden God and God's providence. Finally, we will evaluate God's providence according to our operational definition and in terms of Luther's view of God. This will point the way to a more adequate formulation of God and God's providence in process theology in the next chapter.

Luther's Personal and Historical Matrix

The life and thought of theologian Martin Luther is a monumental example of man's struggle to appropriate the meaning of God's relationship to man and man's relationship to God. For Luther, the nature of this relationship with God was expressed in the formula, Deus pro me--the God for me. It was a struggle borne of the bowels of his soul, a passion to know that in his relationship with the Deus pro me, he stood justified and righteous. This existential passion of relatedness to God through salvation, conditioned the color, tone and force of his theological formulations; his was a theology of the anguished heart more than a theology of rational gymnastics.

A personal confrontation with death and judgment aroused in him a burning desire to be prepared to meet his God. Such preparation was expressed in his words, "I want to escape hell by being a monk."¹ The orienting question became that of finding a God who was able to save and redeem him. But becoming a monk did not quell the tormenting despair of the uncertainty of salvation. Neither the sacraments, nor self-flagellation, nor fanatic spiritual exercises could assuage the feeling that he was still a sinner before God. Only after studying the gospel, especially as

¹Gerhard Ebeling, Luther (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), p. 37.

expressed by Paul in Romans 1:17 did he find the key to salvation. "Finally, thanks to the mercy of God . . . I began to understand the righteousness of God as that through which by God's gift the righteous lives, that is by faith . . . as it is written, 'The righteous shall live by faith.' Then I had the feeling that straight away I was born again."² This personal, passionate struggle for salvation was the energy that drove his theology, and as an existential theology, its sweep and scope embraced the dialectics of human existence before God. His was a theology expressed more in the flashes of light than the mechanics of form.

The historical context of Luther's theology presupposes a complex historical stream, running from the Bible itself. A discussion of all the tributaries is far beyond the scope of this chapter. Only a few isolated features of the historical topography tangential to Luther's time will be highlighted to help set in relief the major historical forces which shaped his life and thought.

Luther was born into the Holy Catholic Church of Rome. Abuses characterized part of the life of the church. The understanding of salvation was shaped partly by a system of indulgences and the earning of merits. The burden of salvation became a personal matter of performing meritorious works that earned the forgiveness and favor of God.

²Ibid., p. 40.

Salvation became man's work, not God's. Of course, grace was an important notion in scholastic theology, grace as infused into the soul of man as a new supernatural faculty enabling him to live a godly life. "Thus, grace ultimately cast man back upon himself, towards his own striving for sanctification, and consequently also into uncertainty regarding himself."³

These teachings (i.e., man's meritorious efforts) and practices of the Church regarding salvation were based more upon the onion layers of traditions than upon the scriptures. The whole scholastic intellectual apparatus informed the seeming priority of reason and tradition over faith and revelation. Theology as a whole in Luther's view was corrupted by so emphasizing man's efforts in earning favor with God and by justifying this through human reason and the authority of church tradition. Thus, Luther's basic quarrel with the Catholic Church centered around the problem of sinful man standing before God in need of salvation. The central problem was one of the proper relationship between God and man and between man and God rather than knowledge of God and good works. This soteriological emphasis was the methodological starting point of his theology. He rebelled more against the scholastic notion of salvation than against the scholastic God.

³Ibid., p. 71.

Aim and Subject Matter of Theology

This, then, leads us to discuss what Luther understood to be the true task of theology in distinction from the scholastic tradition. For him, the subject matter of theology is concerned with the proper relationship between God and of man. "Theology is thus concerned neither with an objective doctrine of God nor with an anthropology that asks questions about man other than those involving his relationship to God."⁴ To say it simply, theology is concerned with man, as sinner, guilty and lost, and with God, as redeemer and justifier; it is a twofold theme of man's guilt and redemption. Theology focuses on the need for righteousness. Ebeling puts this into another set of phrases, "man in the sight of God" and "God with regard to man." According to his dialectical schema, man is viewed from the tension between freedom in Christ and the bondage of sin; and God, from the tension between concealment and revelation.⁵ The explication of how these function will be considered more in detail in what follows.

The subject matter of theology is soteriological. The redeeming work of God among men, salvation by faith in Christ, is the concern which conditions the entirety of

⁴Paul Althaus, The Theology of Martin Luther (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), p. 9.

⁵Ebeling, p. 211.

Luther's theological development and formulation. "Christ is the subject matter of theology."⁶ Speculations about the nature of God are not related to man's salvation.

Luther's View of Reason

The above considerations of the historical context and subject matter can be broadened and deepened by a discussion of Luther's view of metaphysics, reason and philosophy. Such a discussion will set the above in sharper focus. Luther's revolt against the way scholasticism used metaphysics, reason and philosophy to speculate about and approach God provides the wall against which Luther sharpened the cutting edge of his theology. The subject matter of theology is man's guilt and redemption, not speculation about the nature of God. It should be remembered that Luther's revolt against scholasticism was extreme in the angry temper of his rhetoric and in the actual conceptual formulations. Such extremities were conditioned by an historical sitz-im-leben. Thus, because Luther's theological reaction is so strong, it demands even more than most, a careful assessment of the basic intention which informs the body of his thought. And this can help us proportion and balance those instances where his vitriolic rhetoric and conceptual overrun against the scholastics

⁶Althaus, p. 9.

skews his theological vision. This is especially true when we later consider his understanding of God and God's providence.

In considering reason, metaphysics and philosophy, we must state at the outset, to avoid confusion, that Luther uses these terms almost interchangeably, though of course each refers to a different reality. Luther lumped together such notions as philosophy, scholastic philosophy, natural theology, speculative metaphysics, reason, and metaphysics because, though different, they have the same smell. In our discussion we will primarily use the word reason, though others of the terms will be referred to when appropriate.

We can perhaps grasp quickly, if only superficially, the feeling that Luther has about reason when he calls reason a "whore," or a "prostitute," "Frau Hulda," and "Madam Reason."⁷ One can surmise that he hardly had a love affair with reason. The meaning of these images is misunderstood unless "Frau Hulda" is set within the wider and more subtle context of his thought. Luther distinguishes within reason between the two realms in which it functions, i.e., the earthly realm and in the realm of man's relationship to God.

Reason, when understood within the frame of the earthly realm is viewed very positively. Luther writes in

⁷Ibid., p. 70.

eloquent praise of reason as a gift from God. "God has given me my reason and all the faculties of my mind."⁸ Through reason men are able to exercise their God-given lordship over the earth. It is the faculty by which men govern the affairs of state. As Althaus points out, according to Luther, it is the source of culture, the arts and sciences, medicine and law. "None of this is to be despised; rather it is to be regarded and praised as the noble gift of God."⁹ In so evaluating reason, Luther treats it royally when understood as ordering and developing the earthly life. It is a creation given of God to men so that they might properly govern themselves and their world.

However, beyond this positive understanding of the place of reason in the earthly realm, Luther proffers another understanding of reason when man stands before God. From this point of view reason takes on a decidedly negative meaning as when Luther refers to it as "Frau Hulda." Since Luther's theology is shaped by the soteriological question of man's salvation, and since we are now talking about this relationship, it would follow that this conditions the theological meaning of reason.

Fallen man, sinful man, man in the state requiring salvation, cannot use his reason for salvific purposes.

⁸Ibid., p. 64.

⁹Ibid.

Reason is inoperative concerning men's relationship to God. The efficacy of reason is juxtaposed to faith, which alone saves. In this sense it exalts a man's pride in his own achievements, and a step further, gives him self-confidence that replaces God as the giver of life. Man is mistakenly concerned with his own honor, satisfaction and status and displaces God as Creator and Lord. Man's reason vaults him to the height that he thinks of himself as a deity. Reason, therefore, rejects all that does not fit its own conception of how things should be, i.e., it rejects God, his word, grace and faith, which it does not understand. It dismisses God and his gifts as "unbelievable, impossible and absurd."¹⁰ Reason cannot and doesn't generate faith, and hence salvation. It is not hard to see why scholastic speculative theology, the product of reason, is for Luther a very specious enterprise.

The basic intent of scholastic theology was to correlate the authority of the ancient world with the authority of revelation. The task of reason in scholasticism was to "reconcile contradictions, refute objections and develop consequences by use of the syllogistic method."¹¹ Comprehensive systems resulted. The publication of Aristotle's works in the classical medieval period served as a new stimulus and presented new resources in bringing faith

¹⁰Ibid., p. 67.

¹¹Ebeling, p. 8.

and reason together in harmonious relationship. Thomas Aquinas was the giant who attempted such a synthesis in accordance with the principle, "'since grace does not destroy nature, but perfects it, the natural reason must serve faith' . . . a priori there can be no contradiction between theology and philosophy."¹² With this feeling tone toward reason it is not hard to understand why it eventually became "more independent and autonomous and more inaccessible to attempts to bring it into harmonious relationship with the truth of revelation."¹³

Scholastic theology had inherent within it several assumptions which from Luther's point of view allowed it to go astray. It began with creation and assumed that from it one could "learn to know God from the works of creation,"¹⁴ though as creator, God does not save. Knowledge of God, then, became theoretically possible for man, at least man whose reason was illumined by grace. Luther criticizes this notion by asserting that man can never know God by his own reason or strength. God transcends man's efforts to know him.

Another doctrine in scholastic theology to which Luther objected was its notion of grace, mentioned earlier. According to Aristotelian psychology grace was a habitus

¹²Ibid., p. 84.

¹³Ibid., p. 85.

¹⁴Althaus, p. 27.

perfecting man in the faculties of his soul. Practice makes perfect; one becomes a harper by playing the harp. Scholastic theology believed that man's faculties could be infused by grace, enabling him to perfect himself. This in turn led to the notion of merit.¹⁵ Such an understanding of grace, Luther felt, made grace "too manageable and too easily placed at the disposal of men."¹⁶ Luther's attitude toward scholastic theology, conditioned by his failing to personally experience grace as it promised, and by observing the abuses to which it led, was that it was "human presumption." It was an attempt, by speculation, to explain that which cannot be explained.¹⁷ Juxtaposed to the presumption of reason by scholastic theology was Luther's dogged concern for the priority of faith. That reason is "Frau Hulda" is attributable to the use scholastic theology put her to in obscuring the nature of grace and faith, and presuming to obtain grace via the works of reason.

Luther's View of Man's Will

But if man's reason cannot bring him to God, what

¹⁵Ebeling, pp. 90-91.

¹⁶Lee Snook, "Luther's Doctrine of the Real Presence: Critique and Reconstruction from the Point of View of Process Thought" (Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Union Theological Seminary, 1971).

¹⁷Ibid., pp. 16-17.

does this imply about the will of man in relationship to God and his salvation? Understanding Luther's view of man's will brings us closer to understanding its opposite, the providence of God, "via negativa."

We earlier affirmed that the subject matter of theology is "man in the sight of God" and "God with regard to man." (See above.) Man is regarded from the point of view of his freedom and bondage and God from his concealment and revelation. We will next consider man's freedom and bondage, followed by the major focus of this section, God in his concealment and revelation and what that implies about the meaning of the providence of God.

Since the conditioning concern in Luther's theology is soteriological, the important thing to understand about man is his redemption. "The will of man without grace is not free, but enslaved . . . free will is in reality a fabrication, a mere turn of phrase without reality."¹⁸ The will of man in the sight of God is in bondage. Man's will cannot and desires not to lift its eyes upon God; it rather seeks to attribute deity to itself. This is not to deny that men experience and possess psychological freedom of the will towards God and that man wills and does what God wills. "In relation to God, . . . it is impossible for man to be the subject of action, for here he can only be considered as

¹⁸Ebeling, p. 215.

one who receives, who is acted upon, who is subject to judgment, and who is accepted or rejected."¹⁹

The question of man's free will is really the question of the power of the will. Since man does not possess the power to effect righteousness, man's will has no power, and hence no reality. Man experiences himself as a sinner; "man stands under the inescapable necessity of sinning in everything that he is and does . . . man is, however, unable to change his basic will."²⁰ Man is condemned by the law.

Luther's View of God and God's Providence

But if man's will is not free because it cannot effect faith and hence salvation, what does this imply about God, or as we phrased it earlier, "God with regard to man," in his concealment and revelation? At the onset let us state that Luther does not purpose to have a "doctrine of God" or does not attempt to speculatively deduce the "nature" or being of God as he is in himself (aseity). Yet he does imply things about God which presuppose that he shares many of the metaphysical assumptions of his time. It will be our purpose to ferret out his understanding of God with regard to man, to uncover metaphysical assumptions hidden in his theology, discuss how they demonstrate, explicitly or implicitly, Luther's view of providence and

¹⁹Ibid., pp. 218-219.

²⁰Althaus, p. 156.

how the notion of God's providence is in tension with the medieval view of God which Luther shared.

Luther spoke of a "general" and a "proper" knowledge of God. All men have been given a general knowledge that God exists, with "metaphysical attributes such as omnipotence and omniscience . . . his ethical attributes."²¹ This is a knowledge of God through reason, which is in everyman and which confesses that all good comes from God. But such general knowledge of God has limits, as Althaus points out. First, though reason knows that God is, it does not produce certainty that God really will help me. It is not knowledge of the God related to me as the God pro me through faith in Christ. Second, though reason has an idea that God is, it does not know who he is.²² General or natural knowledge of God remains within the purview of the law, outside of the saving gospel. Knowledge of God via reason carried to its logical conclusion is atheism.²³ This form of knowledge of God Luther saw dominating scholastic theology. In its scheme, God, understood as he was in himself, regarded as the 'causa sui' and 'causa prima.' Both God and man were fixed as they were in themselves, neutral facts. But Luther says a general or natural knowledge of God and men in themselves was frightening when it came to the crucial issue

²¹Ibid., p. 16.

²²Ibid.

²³Ebeling, p. 230.

of God in relation to man's redemption. A neutral scheme of causation and fixed relationships was inappropriate to a proper understanding of God's redeeming activity among men.

Proper or inside knowledge of God is disclosed through the word of God and the Holy Spirit in revealing Jesus Christ crucified. The opposite of philosophical speculation, this knowledge points us to the God who came in the flesh to save sinners, to save me, i.e., the God related to me as the God pro me. As Luther says, "We know of no God excepting only the incarnate and human God [Deus incarnatus, Deus humanus] . . . to seek God outside Jesus is the devil."²⁴ The God, so revealed and proclaimed, is the hidden God. God is hidden behind Christ, he is not present to man in his "naked majesty," but "covers and clothes himself with a mask so that we may bear him and grasp him."²⁵ God thus comes to us hidden by "fog and shadows" that he has made for our benefit. He comes to us in masks and disguises in the Christ.

An important corollary is that all the initiative is with God in coming to know him through faith. Man cannot initiate finding God through speculation. God takes the initiative in coming to us. God reveals himself to us as the God who wills our salvation by giving us faith in Christ through the Spirit and the word. The nature of this man's

²⁴Ibid., p. 235.

²⁵Althaus, p. 22.

relationship to and knowledge of God is faith, defined as having to do with things which are not seen (Hebrews 11:1).

"That there may be room for faith, everything which is believed must be concealed; but it cannot be more deeply concealed than under the contrary appearance, sensation, and experience."²⁶ Thus, God is hidden from men behind contraries like the cross, which is called by Luther the theology of the cross (theologia crucis). The almighty power and love of God is revealed to us in a way that goes against our reasonable expectation, viz the weakness of the cross. In this manner, man recognizes him paradoxically where he is hidden amidst suffering and weakness.

". . . Luther's theology of the cross means that the cross conceals God and thus marks the end of all speculation about God on the part of self-confident reason. The cross is the symbol of judgment over man and thus marks the end of all achieving of fellowship with God . . ."²⁷ "The man who believes must repeatedly pass from this experience to that faith which recognizes the reality of the grace, truth, and faithfulness of God hidden under its opposite."²⁸

The basic dialectic in Luther's thought regarding knowledge of God is the hidden and the revealed God. The naked God in his majesty remains hidden from man. It is

²⁶Ebeling, p. 236.

²⁷Althaus, p. 28.

²⁸Ibid., p. 31.

only in the paradox of Christ on the cross that we know God, and this is given to us through faith by God himself. The God of Luther is a hidden God, the Deus absconditus, who remains hidden from our reasonable speculation. Knowledge of him is located in faith, not in reason. God who is revealed can only be believed in. Ebeling more precisely fills out the workings of this dialect by stating:

The contradiction between the two statements, the one that the revealed God himself is the hidden God, and the other that the revealed God is distinguished from the hidden God is resolved by the fact that in order that God may truly be God, Luther maintains to the utmost degree the contradiction between God in Jesus Christ and the God of omnipotence and omniscience, between faith and experience.²⁹

In his argument with Erasmus in Bondage of the Will,³⁰ Luther sharpens the issue of how man's righteousness and God's work of salvation are to be understood. Luther argues against Erasmus that man does not have free will to choose salvation. Salvation is determined, predestined by God for man. Luther argues that predestination is necessary to guarantee salvation. Man cannot be depended upon to produce or choose his own salvation. The mystery of predestination is located in the hidden God and Luther does not wish to speculate upon the working of predestination by the hidden God. The absolute freedom of God's grace is

²⁹Ebeling, p. 240.

³⁰Luther and Erasmus (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1959), pp. 12-28.

preserved and the question of why some accept salvation and why some reject it is left an open question.

For the believer the hidden God is replaced by the revealed God as he is revealed in the paradox of Christ on the cross. This revealed God overcomes the terror of the hidden God. This is the only God the sinner is able to turn to. He cannot turn to the God who is hidden and who terrifies through the law which judges. Nevertheless, the hidden God does not disappear, but stands in the background of the God revealed in Christ. The sufficiency of the God who saves is guaranteed by the all-powerful, hidden God who predestines. Though God is in a sense related to man through the revealed paradox of the Christ event, the fundamental understanding of God for the Christian believer is the all-powerful, absolutely free God who predestines men to salvation.

A statement which lays bare Luther's basic understanding of God hidden who terrifies through the law, and God revealed, who comes to man through his gift of faith in Christ on the cross, begs several questions about the hidden God. Luther asserted strongly that we cannot know God in se. He is known only in the paradoxes of his masks: by indirection. Yet, as free as Luther wishes to remain of assumptions about God's nature, he nevertheless shares metaphysical assumptions about the hidden God with the intellectual climate of his day. In the final analysis the

"Deus absconditus" presupposes some hidden assumptions which need to be ferreted out to more clearly ascertain God's loving relation to man and the world, i.e., his providence.

It should be borne in mind that Luther did not reject scholastic theology's view of God, but rather, its doctrine of faith. "Faith does not come from an examination of the works of God, but rather faith is necessary in order to see that God has unveiled himself in these works, and therefore, the only thing permissible for a man of faith is to speak of the masks or the coverings of God, and not of the essence of God, or the being of God."³¹

A starting point to get at these notions is Luther's strong belief in God as the Creator. God creates and preserves everything. In fact, "being God and creating are identical. God is God because he and only he creates."³² God the creator means that he is always at work; "and reality depends on his continuous and uninterrupted activity."³³ Luther distinguishes man's work from God's work. Man's work can be completed and he can walk away from it. But God's work never ends because without him the world would not survive. God is forever creating and preserving in on-going activity. Luther calls this creative presence the "right hand of God." Nor is this activity done from afar. God is present in the smallest and the greatest of

³¹Snook, p. 95. ³²Althaus, p. 105. ³³Ibid.

creatures," in its inner most and outermost being, on all sides, through and through, below and above, before and behind, so that nothing can be more truly present and within all creatures than God himself with his power."³⁴ God is intimately related with the creatures of his creation in a powerful and in an all-encompassing way. ". . . God's creative power and his sovereign freedom are linked to one another and are absolutely essential for faith."³⁵ Such a God, in powerful, omnipresent, creative activity is the God upon whom men can trust. Such a God is worthy of trust because such a God can save me. He is the God pro me.

Implied in this understanding of God as the powerful creator are God's omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence. For this God, though present in his creation, continues to transcend the world, paradoxically. "The power of God cannot be so determined and measured, for it is uncircumscribed, immeasurable, beyond and above all that is or may be."³⁶ God's power is transcendent, it is omnipotent, omniscient, beyond the understanding of man, and therefore capable of being trustworthy. God is the only causal agent of all things, and free and powerful, he transcends our reason. God is free from all contingency. The hidden, all-powerful, all-present God is known to us only by

³⁴Ibid., p. 106.

³⁵Snook, p. 97.

³⁶Althaus, p. 107.

indirection in the hiddenness of his masks. God's relationship to the world "does not in any way limit God's freedom or abridge his power or detract from his sole possession of all creativity."³⁷ All action is ascribed to God, the action of a personal and present power. He is actus purus. To this degree the active, related God is close to the Biblical witness of the creator God, free and powerful, who is constant in purpose.

This God "through his omnipotence does all things in his foreknowledge, and since he is pure will, predetermines everything."³⁸ Unless he were omnipotent he would be a ridiculous God. He is a power related to and sustaining his world in provident loving care; and in relation to man, God alone forgives, redeems, and gives assurance of salvation; omnipotent. He is everywhere present in his love; omnipresent. He knows the future before it happens and moves creation in the direction of his purposes; omniscient. Luther's God, Deus absconditus, and lover of the world, is a majestic God worthy of fear and awe. This loving, all-powerful God wills salvation for men; he is the subject of salvation. As Luther says he is "nothing but burning love and a glowing oven full of love."³⁹ Thus Luther's God is a loving, provident God, creating and sustaining his

³⁷Snook, p. 98. ³⁸Ebeling, p. 240.

³⁹Althaus, p. 116.

creation; and his will, made known in his word, is that all might be redeemed.

Evaluation of Luther's View of God's Providence

Luther's formulation of a provident, loving God, on the face of it, is a powerful statement, especially in making God the sufficient source of faith and salvation. In this sense, the formulation of God is consistent with his intention of preserving God's sovereignty regarding salvation. But it is apparent that the Deus absconditus has hidden assumptions which are not free of metaphysical coloration. Luther's God, as omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent, is much like the God of scholastic theology in its metaphysical grounding. We need to examine this grounding to see problems it raises for us in the apparent tension with Luther's understanding of God's providence as being related to man by being the God pro me.

The question implicit in his thought is the question of his aseity versus his loving relationship to the world. Luther's intention is to preserve the Godness of God, his trustworthiness, and his powerful, pervasive activity. But the question is, does Luther's God retain its Godness in the context of his assertion of the "oven of God's love?" Luther speaks of God's relationship to the world but such relationship is only a one way street. God's aseity prevents him from being affected, and in a sense determined

by what men do. "Since he determines everything with his almighty working, I know that nothing and nobody can resist his will."⁴⁰ Because God is free and unchangeable, nothing can affect his will. As Luther says, "All things are from God . . . There is nothing left for us to do except give thanks to God."⁴¹ It is clear that there is a tension between his passionate sense of God's presence and efficacy, and the hidden metaphysical assumptions of God's aseity that he shares with scholastic theology. Further, Luther's God cannot himself be affected by the world. As Snook states, "So while Luther speaks of God as the one who sustains and cares for the world, it is impossible for God to care about the world or to be affected in any way by what happens in the world. He cares for the world in such a way that he is not himself touched or moved or changed."⁴² Thus God does not take into account the creaturely response to God's loving kindness. Can God's love and grace make sense in a framework where God is all and man can only offer a prayer of thanks which itself is from God?

Luther's understanding of God's providence fits very much within the framework of our operational definition of God's providence. Luther's God is related, loving, efficacious, the source of order and novelty. The problem

⁴⁰Ibid., pp. 110-116.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 123.

⁴²Snook, p. 106.

then is not the question of whether Luther intends that God be providential, but rather, whether his God is providential from the standpoint of his relatedness to man. Luther intends that his God be related. Unfortunately, Luther was captive of the form of God in classical theology, a God whose aseity, by definition, precluded him from two way relatedness, which we assume to be the real meaning of the word "related." Thus, the nature of God cuts against the real intention of Luther that God be related to man. This would appear to necessitate a reconstruction of God from the point of view of process theology which is promising in its attempts to mitigate the tension between a God efficaciously related to the world, as effect and affected.

One more point needs to be mentioned before leaving the theology of Luther to consider a contemporary reconstruction of the tension inherent in his view of God and providence. Luther's polemics against speculative metaphysics, as exemplified in process theology, might appear to stand in the way of such a reconstruction. Yet, his polemic is attenuated by remembering that his rejection of scholastic speculative theology was aimed more at its corruption of the notion of faith than its understanding of God. Once inside the circle of faith, might it not be possible to assess in a metaphysical way the meaning of statements about God as omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient? Certainly the hidden God is not so hidden after

all if his hiddenness has literal predicates which can be analyzed by reason. As one theologian has stated:

It is not all that certain that he [Luther] would disallow all natural theology or all metaphysics . . . he would have been horrified that his own polemics had become normative for judgments about the truth . . . in principle then it should be possible to correct Martin Luther on those issues about which he was most adamant.⁴³

Let us proceed, then, to reconstruct a view of God which allows for Luther's strong sense of providence and attenuates the tension of a metaphysically unrelated God.

⁴³Ibid., p. 54.

Chapter 3

WHITEHEAD AND PROVIDENCE

Purpose of Chapter

The purpose of Chapter 3 is implied in Chapter 2. There we assessed Luther's theological formulation as it bore in on his understanding of God and God's providence. We concluded that Luther has a great sense of God's activity among men and in the world, especially within a soteriological framework. In tension with this sense of the God pro me, was a view of God which shared the metaphysical assumptions of his age. This view of God, as impassive, non-contingent, all-powerful, all-creative, etc., was philosophically contradictory to the intention of Luther of making God related as the God pro me. It is the purpose of this chapter to develop an understanding of God which appropriates the traditional Christian sense of God's relationship to the world, as for example Luther's, and which eliminates the metaphysical contradiction of his unrelatedness (aseity). We will draw primarily from the process philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead and its implications for Christian theology.

Again, even more than in Chapter 1, we must limit our discussion of Whitehead's metaphysics. Its vast scope

and complexity necessitate a narrowing to pertinent concepts presented in a simplified manner. Some technical terms cannot be avoided, but we will attempt to present them in as conceptually manageable a form as possible.

This chapter will be organized and developed in the following order. First, we will consider the intention of Whitehead's metaphysics in a general way, especially setting the context for his discussion about God. Secondly, we will present a general discussion of his metaphysical scheme, especially focusing on the notion of initial aim as the way into an understanding of providence. Thirdly, we will discuss his process view of God and how this can compare with basic notions from Christian theology. Lastly, we will compare Luther's and the process view of God's providence and illuminate those ways in which process theology seems to be a superior formulation in mitigating the tension between God's providence and his aseity. This will set the context for Chapter 4 which will discuss theoretically and practically, ways that prayer can be useful in helping Christians to appropriate the sense of God's providence, i.e., his loving efficaciousness, the source of novelty and order.

Intention of Whitehead's Metaphysics

Alfred North Whitehead was not a theologian and not a philosopher until his later years. He was known in his

earlier years as a mathematician and an educator. Among his best known early writings was Principia Mathematica, a book on the theoretical basis of mathematics and logic which he co-authored with Bertrand Russell. In his later years his focus shifted from mathematics and science to a concern for civilization in general, and to metaphysics in particular. His metaphysical reflection, rich in its suggestiveness and comprehensive in its scope, was particularly concerned with an integration of the scientific and religious world views. His background as a mathematician and scientist gave him first hand experience with an understanding of the triumphs and shortcomings of the modern scientific vision of reality. On the one hand, the impressive success of science in modern times had earned for itself a rightful place of respect among modern men. On the other hand, the scientific vision seemed so complete and full of so much potential that religious vision seemed excluded from its place among men. In Religion in the Making, Whitehead states: "The modern world has lost God and is seeking him . . . The reason for this stretches far back in the history of Christianity."¹ Whitehead felt that such displacement of God by the modern scientific vision was unnecessary and unfortunate. He saw as his metaphysical

¹Alfred North Whitehead, Religion in the Making (New York: World, 1926), p. 74.

task the formation of a vision that would allow for both the categories of science and religious insights. His work of bringing together "the concept of God integrally into relation with science [has been done] more effectively than any thinker since the beginning of the eighteenth century."² It should be remembered that Whitehead's thought is not that of a confessing Christian, like Luther, but rather the formulation of a metaphysical vision which integrates a scientific vision with a vision of God. While philosophic and metaphysical in orientation, it is a rich understanding of reality which provides conceptual resources for contemporary theology as it points to the reality of God, much as Aristotle's metaphysics did for Aquinas in the middle ages.

While not specifically Christian, Whitehead's assessment of the place of God in a modern metaphysics was shaped by the history of the Western tradition. Though he was influenced by an understanding of other religious traditions his philosophical ideas about God had a Western cast, in that it was the Western Christian civilization which he was addressing.

Whitehead saw some fundamental problems with the Christian conception of God developed over the centuries.

²Ivor Leclerc, "Whitehead and the Problem of God," Southern Journal of Philosophy, VII (Winter 1969-1970), 447.

He portrays the problem of God as threefold. God is portrayed as the 1) imperial ruler, 2) stern moral judge, and 3) the unmoved mover. The three streams of thought can be associated with the divine Caesars, the Hebrew prophets, and Aristotle.³ The image of God as the imperial ruler drew on the understanding of God as the all-powerful ruler of the universe. The image of God as the stern moralist came from the Hebrew prophets who understood God as the judge of the sins of Israel. The unmoved mover came from the philosophy of Aristotle where God was the first cause, the ultimate philosophical principle.

Christian theology over the centuries was a confluence of these three strains of thought. The consequent vision of God was an "aboriginal, eminently real, transcendent creator, at whose fiat the world came into being, and whose imposed will it obeys."⁴ This vision, according to Whitehead, overpowered the "brief Galilean vision of humility" which emerged in the life of Jesus. This vision of God "does not emphasize the ruling Caesar, or the ruthless moralist or the unmoved mover. It dwells upon the tender elements in the world, which slowly and in quietness operate by love and it finds purpose in the

³Donald Sherburne, A Key to Whitehead's "Process and Reality" (New York: Macmillan, 1966), p. 178.

⁴Ibid.

present immediacy of a kingdom not of this world."⁵ It is a love that "neither rules nor is it unmoved." Thus, God as the lover of the world, as manifest in Jesus of Nazareth, flickered uncertainly, and was overshadowed by God as Caesar, the ruthless moralist and the unmoved mover.

Jesus, as found in the gospels, is for Whitehead a better basis for an understanding of God for the Christian West. Jesus stressed the efficacy of persuasive love rather than overwhelming brute force and showed patience and tenderness with others. He taught and exemplified high ideals, was an ideal companion who shared in the joys and sorrows of others. He grew as a person and used evil as a stepping stone to good.⁶ It is these impressions of Jesus that provide the formative elements of Whitehead's understanding of God. But before discussing God specifically in Whitehead's metaphysics, we need to have a grasp of his total metaphysical vision. Of course we can only consider a few of the key ideas, given the scope and nature of our discussion here. While some technical terms need to be employed, these will be kept to a minimum. The emphasis is to provide a metaphysical context wherein we can see how the notion of God functions in the more specific theological

⁵Ibid., p. 179.

⁶A. H. Johnson, Whitehead's Philosophy of Civilization (New York: Dover, 1962), p. 70.

formulation.

General Discussion of Whitehead's
Metaphysical Scheme

The universe is a continually developing and evolving process of becoming. The older philosophical notions of the universe as material substance gives way to a philosophy of organisms called actual entities, the basic units of which constitute themselves in their subjectivity. They are not caused purely by the determination of an external agency, such as God. Rather, they are causa sui, self-causing, self-constituting, self-creating units of energy. "The being of an actual entity is constituted by its becoming ("concreting") so that how it becomes constitutes what it is."⁷ This becoming occurs by a complex process of interaction with other actual entities which stand in the past of the becoming actual entity. The basic process whereby an actual entity becomes a subjective unity is true from the smallest unit of the universe, presumably subatomic events, to the most encompassing, God. The basic scheme of becoming characterizes the universe in its entirety. There are no exceptions; only differences of degree in that different levels of reality integrate their

⁷Lee Snook, "Luther's Doctrine of the Real Presence: Critique and Reconstruction from the View of Process Thought" (Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Union Theological Seminary, 1971), p. 203.

past in their self-creation in more or less complex and inclusive ways. In its self-creation the human individual considers more data in its becoming than a maple leaf. Both exemplify the same basic features of becoming, i.e., self-creation through "prehending" or taking account of the past mentality and physicality of other actual entities. The actual entity in its becoming is the fundamental center of energy in the universe.

This is only the broad brush strokes of the nature of the basic unit of existence. We need now to consider in more detail how these basic units become in their self-constitution. Whitehead was impressed by two fundamental perceptions of the way things are. He noted that at the heart of things were order and novelty. Reality does not present itself to experience as either chaotic or fully repetitive. What constitutes this seemingly orderly and creative advance? It appears to us in our experience that life is a continuous process of making decisions regarding the possible ways of organizing our experience. We seem ever confronted by new possibilities which have a sense of definiteness and reality about them. Part of these possibilities come to us from our own past and from other past persons and events (actual entities). The past actual entities in this sense are "causally efficacious," they make an impact and partly shape our choices of becoming. The becoming actual entity takes account of these past

actual entities directly by means of "physical prehensions." There are other prehensions of forms, relations, or qualities in abstraction from particular actual entities of the past which are called "conceptual prehensions." Whitehead also calls the objects of such prehensions "eternal objects." These resemble Plato's forms in that they are pure possibilities that have the potential to be realized in the becoming actual entity. Since these pure possibilities have a definiteness about them, they must be somewhere, which raises the question of their location. Whitehead affirms that they are located in God. This we will consider more in detail later.

We have, then, actual entities which create themselves from the aims given by God and from the pure possibilities or eternal objects. But how is it that this potential chaos of pure possibilities appears to exemplify order, as well as novelty? This order occurs partly because the becoming actual entity has a purpose that guides it in the selection of the possibilities that constitute it. This purposiveness amidst the vast system of relationships between pure possibilities is called by Whitehead the "initial aim." But where does this initial aim come from? God, says Whitehead, gives the initial aim that guides the purposive self-creation of the actual entities.

Let us briefly summarize the foregoing bare-bones

sketch, adding a few ingredients, and in so doing, setting the context for a discussion of that which is the source of order and novelty in this creative advance, viz. God. The universe from top to bottom is composed of actual entities. Whitehead's whole philosophy is the explication of these actual entities and the way they are related to each other in their self-creation. The actual entitiesprehend past actual entities and eternal objects (pure possibilities). They integrate all these influences into their self-constitution. They experience a moment of subjective unity ("satisfaction") then themselves "retire" into the past to influence other becoming actual entities ("objective immortality"). They become, they are, and then they are no more, except as influences on the future. This self-creation is orderly in following the initial aim, the purpose given by God. While the past, and the initial aim are givens, nevertheless, the self-creation is a free process, within set limits. Thus, there is order and novelty at the same time. This summary of the basic scheme begs many questions, especially a more precise discussion of how the felt order and novelty via initial aim and eternal objects are given to the becoming actual entity. The act of giving presupposes a notion of the giver. That leads us to discuss more fully the function of God as he relates to the world of actual entities as the source of order and novelty.

Whitehead's God and Theological Concepts
Relating to Providence

God, for Whitehead functions as an actual entity. He is not an exception to the metaphysical scheme, and as an exception, unrelated to the world in any organic way. God, as an actual entity, is related to the vast system of relationships between actual entities, though his relationship is also very different. God is the "chief exemplification" in the system of actual entities. He functions, generally, as the "principle of concretion" and the "principle of limitation." As the "principle of concretion" and the "principle of limitation" he provides the patterns of possibility which guide the self-creation of the actual entity. He arranges and orders these possibilities in such a way as to be relevant to the situation of each actual entity. He excludes some possibilities, includes others, i.e., he limits the realm of potential to an appropriate scope. In this way he is the source of novelty and order in that he organizes the patterns which are possible for a particular actual entity and makes them available. Let us explore this more in detail, relating it to some understanding of what God is in himself (God in se) and God as he functions relationally with the world.

God has two basic natures, "The primordial nature" and the "consequent nature." The primordial nature is "the unconditional conceptual valuation of the entire

multiplicity of eternal objects," (PR 46) and as such is non-temporal. There are three basic functions of the primordial nature. First, it grades the eternal objects in terms of their relevance for each other in relationships of diversity and pattern. Second, it grades the relevance of eternal objects for specific actual entities in their self-creation. It is this ordering which gives metaphysical stability to the universe and makes possible order and novelty. Third, it makes this graded relevance effective in the world by providing the initial aim to each becoming actual entity. To go back to our earlier statement about God as the principle of limitation and concretion, he is such by the giving of the initial aim to the becoming actual entity which shapes the way it will order the eternal objects for its own becoming.

God's "consequent nature" is "the physical prehension by God of the actualities in the evolving universe." (PR 134) The primordial nature of God has no actuality in itself. It is the consequent nature of God, which is actual, which relates God to the evolving universe of actual entities. There are two functions of the consequent nature. First, God prehends every part of the satisfaction of every actual entity. Secondly, God takes these satisfactions and blends and weaves them into a unity of feeling. Thus, the achievements of all actual entities are preserved in the harmony of God's satisfaction. God preserves the world

and transforms ("transmutes") it by weaving everything into his ultimate purpose of beauty.

The functions of these two natures, then, provide the basis to see in more detail the way that God is related to the world and the way that the world is related to God; hence, the basis for talking about God's providence. Let us focus especially on the initial aim and the subjective form. God purposes that the world envision order and novelty and that each actual entity maximize the potentials offered to it in its own self-creation. This is because he is concerned with how each actual entity develops, especially as that development embodies God's own aim at the harmony of his possibilities. God is related to actual entities in their own development in giving to them their initial aim. This aim for its ideal satisfaction is the key factor shaping how an actual entity will shape itself. God presents to it the eternal objects ordered in such a way as to be relevant to their becoming. God's relation to an actual entity, however, is not one of force or coercion. The initial aim is not presented in such a way so as to be the only cause constitutive of the becoming entity. It is not done in the way of the imperial Caesars. The initial aim is presented in the form of persuasion, not as God superimposing his irrefutable and irresistible will. The creature, within its finite giving is basically free to use the initial aim, given by God, in its own way. It can

either reject it, accept it, or respond anywhere in-between. The actual entity is free to reject God's purposes for it if it so wills.

The subjective form it adopts is up to the experiencing subject. The subjective form is the way in which it feels the initial aim, its "emotional reaction to it."⁸ It is "how the subject of the prehension feels the datum of that prehension."⁹ There are many species of subjective forms, such as emotions, valuations, purposes, adversion, aversions, consciousness, etc. The initial aim determines the comprehensive way in which the subjective forms influence each other, embody the way the initial aim, which guides the inter-actions, is felt and made efficacious in the subject.

The activity of God as the principle of limitation in providing the initial aim, implies that God as actual entity, is actual, for only what is actual can have efficacy on other actual entities (the ontological principle). Thus Whitehead's God is not an abstraction that fills out his metaphysical scheme, but rather by virtue of his actuality, is included in the scheme. God is of this world as an actual entity, efficacious, as we have seen so far, by his

⁸John W. Lango, "The Relatedness of Eternal Objects in Whitehead's Process and Reality," Process Studies, I:2 (Summer 1971), 126.

⁹Sherburne, p. 245.

giving of the initial aim. God's actuality provides that the eternal objects which participate in him are efficacious for the world of actual entities.

But this provision of the eternal objects by God's primordial nature is only part of the way that he is related to the world. God's ordering of eternal objects in a way that is relevant to the becoming of each entity presupposes that he knows what is relevant by being related to the world in the first place. The initial aim must be shaped by God's prior knowledge of the situation into which the initial aim is given. Thus, not only is God related to the world in such a way that he gives the actual entities the initial aim which the becoming aims at, but also God receives from the world that he might know it. God prehends the temporal world just as the world prehends him in the giving of the initial aim. This is the function of the consequent nature of God (see above). The consequent nature prehends the world in order that the initial aims are appropriate.

But the prehension of the world is for other reasons besides the provision of the appropriate initial aim. God's consequent nature also prehends the world for his own sake, i.e., the world contributes to the richness of God's own becoming. God is dependent on the world to enrich his becoming just as, though in a different form, the world is dependent on God for the initial aim which guides its

becoming. God's character via the consequent nature is derived from the world.

The above discussion of God and his relationship to the world implies several things about what God is and is not in himself, and about his relationship to the world as evaluated from the framework of traditional Christian theological concepts and doctrines, viz, omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence. This will help us in transition from a speculative metaphysics, which is not written as a Christian theology, though it is influenced by Christian experience and formulations, to a process theology. This will enable us to evaluate Luther and process theology in terms of God's providence.

Whitehead's God is not the transcendent and omnipotent being that stands outside of a metaphysical scheme; he is not an exception to the metaphysical categories. His being, though vastly different from that of other actual entities, still exhibits similar basic characteristics. Whitehead rejects the God of Aristotle which, as the prime mover, stands outside the worldly process. Rather, God as an actual entity within the process of the world, is intimately involved with the entirety of the evolving process at every level of organization.

God's in se is not a static, perfected once-and-for-all kind of being which is underived and fully necessary. This understanding of God presupposes that God stands

outside the influences of his creation. Such a totally transcendent God is totally beyond the influences of the creation upon him. As perfected being (aseity), he has no need to be enriched in his own life by the events of the world. He doesn't need or feel the world. As an omnipotent being, he has total power in the universe and is the efficient cause of all that happens. God's power is sufficient that whatever he wills comes to pass. This is the God of the Caesars whose will rides roughshod over the rest of creation. He alone is necessary, free, creative.

In contrast, Whitehead's God, while powerful, is not omnipotent in the traditional sense of the word. God is omnipotent in that he is causally efficacious via the initial aim given to each becoming actual entity. But this influence is not that of an imperial ruler who wills what comes to pass. The power of Whitehead's God is his power of persuasion, perhaps even a more effective type of power than fiat.¹⁰ His is the persuasive power of love which respects the freedom of the becoming actual entity in its self-creation. Such respect of freedom may represent a higher ideal of relatedness than that of overpowering force. God is the lure which urges the creation to higher forms of self-creation.

¹⁰J. E. Barnhart, "Persuasive and Coercive Power in Process Metaphysics," Process Studies, III (Fall 1973).

The traditional conception of omniscience implied that God was all knowing, that he knew everything in the past, present, and future. Whitehead's God knows and preserves everything that happens in the past because the consequent nature of God prehends the satisfaction of every actual entity. This knowledge of the world enables him to order the eternal objects so as to provide the initial aim in a way appropriate to each actual entity. In turn, his knowledge of the world enriches his own inner life and being. God develops and responds in concert with the development and response of the world. God is not omniscient with respect to the future because the future is always in a doubt. The future is made by the becoming actual entities and since it is dependent upon their response to God's aim, the future is unknowable in principle. To know the future would presuppose to know how the actual entities will choose, which denies freedom of choice. The future becomes what it is by virtue of creaturely freedom. God cannot know or guarantee it will be thus and so. God's own future is by inference unknowable because it also depends on how the actual entities constitute themselves.

The traditional view of omnipresence is that God is everywhere present, i.e., there is nowhere where he is not. Whitehead also seems to imply that God is omnipresent in much the same way. This is presupposed by God's prehension

of every actual entity which implies that he must be everywhere prehending. This notion of God's omnipresence is somewhat confused in Whitehead's own work. Some recent Whiteheadians, notably John Cobb, have tried to clarify this via the concept of "regional inclusion."¹¹ His arguments seem quite convincing.

Evaluation of Whitehead and Luther

With this outline of Whitehead's view of God, it is now possible to evaluate the point of view of God's providence as contained in our operational definition, viz., God's relationship to the world as efficacious love, the source of order and novelty. Much of the foregoing has implied a notion of God's providence, though it was not explicitly identified as such.

God is related to the world. He is related in two main ways. God is the source of the initial aim for each actual entity and the source of the eternal objects. God orders the past so as to present to the actual entities that aim and those possibilities which are relevant to its becoming. The eternal objects would not be available to the actual entities unless God were related to them. The process of giving the initial aim itself presupposes (as we

¹¹John B. Cobb, Jr., A Christian Natural Theology (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), pp. 82ff; 192ff.

indicated earlier) that God is related to the world such that he knows what is relevant to offer in the first place. God in this sense must take account or prehend the actual world.

God is related in another sense, implied in, though separate from his offer of the initial aim. God is related in the sense that he derives his own being from his relationship to the world of actual entities. God's being, far from completed, is a process of becoming like other actual entities. As such its becoming is dependent upon taking account of the actual entities which make up his past. God's future is in a state of openness, dependent for its completion upon the world. This prehension of the world by God's consequent nature completes the 'being' of God. God is related if the world is causally efficacious for and upon God. God is causally efficacious for the world through his giving of the initial aim. The world in turn is efficacious upon God as he derives his own becoming and self-constitution from it. This prehending of the world by God, guarantees that the world will be everlastingly preserved because God is everlasting.

That God's efficacious relation to the world is loving efficaciousness, is a dominant theme in Whitehead and process theology. God's power, especially as manifest in Jesus, is the power of persuasive love. God works slowly and in quietness operates by love. God is the lover of the

world, the "great companion," "the fellow sufferer who understands." His loving aim is that actual entities will maximize their potential at strength of beauty.

God is also the source of novelty and order. His primordial nature contains that which novelty presupposes, namely the eternal objects. His ordering of the eternal objects in a relevant way for the actual entities ensures that their self-constitution will not be a dull repetition of the past and its aims. God's offering of the eternal objects guarantees that such novelty will be present in addition to the elements from past actual entities. God is the "principle of potentiality" as well as the "principle of limitation" and the "principle of concretion." The endless stream of becoming is gradual; it does not present itself as disjunctive and chaotic. This is so because God guides the flow of becoming as it relates to God's own aim at the purposive beauty of his own becoming. God is the source of novelty and order.

This discussion now enables us to evaluate God's providence in the process God and in Martin Luther in terms of adequacy for contemporary theology. In so evaluating we must keep several things in mind. If we hold strict doctrinal adherence to past theological formulations to be the only norm, we run the risk of being closed. From this point of view one must understand God just as Luther understood him. Whitehead's God would only seem a threat to the

omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent God of Luther. There could be no fundamental dialogue. If we hold only what seems presently appropriate for Christian belief without considering the religious intentions of past theological formulations, we run the risk of making God after our own image and reducing him to philosophical speculations alone. In some way, then, we need to root our assessment both in the Christian tradition, by use of an operational definition of providence derived from it, and from an analysis of what seems appropriate in our own age. Since we already have a definition, let us discuss what in the way of God's providence is appropriate in our own day.

The phrase "God's providence" has been sparsely used in our contemporary theological situation, largely because the use of the referent God has been problematic.¹² Especially absent has been a clear affirmation of God's efficacy in the world and thus the reluctance to talk about God in univocal language. John Cobb has discussed both this loss of the sense of divine efficacy¹³ and the lack of univocal language. The loss of the former would lead to the loss of

¹²Albert C. Outler, Who Trusts in God (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), pp. 3-30; Maurice Wiles (ed.) Providence (London: S.P.C.K., 1968); and Paul Spohnheim, "Transcendence in Relationship," Dialog, XII:4 (Autumn 1973), 264-271.

¹³John B. Cobb, Jr., "Natural Causality and Divine Action," Idealistic Studies, III:3 (September 1973).

the latter. Cobb argues that though modern theologians have talked about God as being a cause in the world (formal cause--Wieman; material cause--Tillich; and final cause--Pannenberg), none have talked about God as efficient cause. Efficient causality is important because "God must be some kind of cause of events or else there is no point in speaking of him at all."¹⁴ Elsewhere,¹⁵ he explores the way in which Whitehead's metaphysics includes this sense of God's influence in the world as efficient causality. One criterion important for a theological understanding of God's providence in the contemporary situation, is that it speaks of God's efficient causality.

Our age is a scientific and technological age. This has meant that the philosophy of science, especially scientific materialism has had a profound influence in the shaping of human understanding. The impressiveness of the scientific empirical method has done much to undermine speaking of non-material, non-empirically verifiable reality, such as God. Man's hubris via his employment of the scientific method has overshadowed any sense of needing the "God of our fathers." Thus, it is important that if the experience of God through faith is to make a case for itself

¹⁴John B. Cobb, Jr., "Speaking About God," Religion in Life, XXXVI:1 (Spring 1967), p. 29.

¹⁵Cobb, "Natural Causality and Divine Action," p. 207.

in our contemporary situation, it must do so by demonstrating that science is not threatening. This it must do taking full account of the achievements of science while at the same time pointing up its limitations in its own terms. A modern understanding of God's providence must take account of science.

A by-product of man's experience within science is that he has experienced a sense of freedom, authority, and creativity. Human self-confidence in its own freedom and abilities has also shaped contemporary self-understanding. A modern understanding of God's providence must take account of human freedom.

Another by-product of science has been a sense that reality is evolutionary (e.g., theory of evolution), i.e., it exhibits growth, and that such evolution presupposes the interacting relationships between the realities of the world. From nature there has developed an intuition of the relatedness of all things. Current ecological understandings in biology illustrate the enormous interdependence of natural phenomena. A modern understanding of God's providence must include a sense of the interrelatedness and interdependence of experienced reality.

More elements than causal efficacy, science, human freedom, and the interrelationship and interdependence of reality could be proffered as characterizing the contemporary situation. However, these three we have selected,

along with a timeless philosophical criterion of consistency, as determinative in evaluating the adequacy of a contemporary formulation of God's providence. From the conclusion of Chapter 1 regarding the tension in Luther's thought between God's aseity and his providence, and of this chapter regarding the Whiteheadian understanding of God and God's providence, the latter would seem to be the superior formulation. Let us pull together the strands of the foregoing discussion of Luther and Whitehead to see if this is so.

One of the major problems in Luther's theology is that of the tension between God's aseity and the God pro me. Since this has been discussed in detail earlier, we will only summarize the conclusions here. The tension is that God is completed, eternal, absolute, free from contingency; at the same time that he is personally active, enabling, and related to the Christian as the God pro me. This is not paradoxical; it is contradictory. Also for Luther, God is powerful and creative enough to redeem sinners. In fact, to preserve his soteriological sufficiency, God is the only cause, alone free and creative in the world. Though Luther does allow for the psychological freedom of man's will, we get the definite sense that man's freedom (vs. God's freedom) is nominal. Even when man offers a prayer of thanks to God for his love and redemption, the prayer is by God. God seems to be the only causal agent in the world

that really counts. Man's freedom doesn't seem to matter much as making a difference. Luther's notion of God than, runs counter to some of the elements we listed earlier as needing to be taken account of for a contemporary formulation of God's providence. Luther was concerned with soteriology and faith, not science. He minimizes human freedom. His God, while being active in the world, is in the final analysis unrelated and unaffected. God is efficacious upon the world but the world cannot be causally efficacious upon him.

The process view of God drawn from Whitehead appears to be strong where Luther's view is deficient. Both speak strongly, though each in their own way, of God's love and his involvement in the world. The process view is superior in taking account of the contemporary influence of science, human freedom, and interrelatedness and interdependence. Only a few additional statements need to be made since this seems implicit in the foregoing discussion in this chapter. The Whiteheadian view of God's providence places God within the metaphysical scheme as an actual entity (albeit superior) among actual entities. He is causally efficacious upon the world through his proffering of the initial aim. Also, the world is causally efficacious upon God. He is related to and dependent upon the world in the important sense that his own becoming is derived from the becoming of actual entities. God "creates" the world and the world

"creates" God. This view, shaped profoundly by science, speaks of God's providential activity in ways that are not in conflict with science. God's reality and activity is affirmed, fully critiquing science's displacement of God on its own terms. Finally, the process view makes a stronger case for human freedom (actual entities are causa sui) than does Luther, while still affirming human dependence upon God for existence and direction.

If the process view commends itself to the contemporary Christian experience of faith in God's providence, it remains for us to discuss how Christians can more fully develop a sense of God's presence and activity. This will be developed in the next chapter which will discuss the use of prayer as a vehicle to appropriate a finer sense of the way God, through his providential activity of proffering the initial aim, lures us to fuller selfhood.

Chapter 4

PRAYER AND PROVIDENCE

Purpose of Chapter

The discussion in Chapter 3 outlines the way that God's providence can be formulated philosophically and theologically. However, the question of experiencing the will of God and directly affecting God's activity in a Christian believer's life was left unanswered, though it was implied. The purpose of this chapter is to address the question of how the believer can experience God's providential presence and activity through appropriation of the will of God for his own life and how the believer influences God's actions. We shall discuss prayer as the vehicle by which Christians can appropriate God's will and affect God. Other vehicles, such as worship and the sacraments could be used, but we have selected prayer as important in this process. Also, we will use the term "God's will" more than God's providence since the way that it is used more directly speaks of God's providential activity in the personal believer's life. However, the two terms are often substituted for each other in theological reflection and in personal experience.

This chapter will focus primarily on Martin Luther's

understanding of prayer, especially as it is related to his understanding of God's providence. We have shown that Luther's inherited scholastic theology shaped an understanding of God's providence that undermined his religious intention. This chapter will indicate that the meaningfulness of prayer is in tension with his received scholastic theology as it shaped his understanding of God. Luther's understanding of God as it affects prayer needs reformulation if prayer is to be theologically and experientially meaningful as Luther intended. The basis for this reformulation has been prepared for in Chapter 2 where we stated that Luther's religious intentions regarding providence can be preserved by using a Whiteheadian framework to reshape an understanding of God's providence. We will extend that argument in this chapter to include prayer, since the grounding of prayer is in providence. If the latter can be reformulated meaningfully, as we have argued, it would follow that this would apply also to the former. We will contend that a Whiteheadian position can provide a fulfilling context for Luther's understanding of prayer as it is practiced in our day. Such a context can include and further develop Luther's intentions.

Specifically this chapter will be organized in the following way: First, we will discuss problems of contemporary prayer that provide the context for the discussion, especially the modern sense of God's

contemporary presence. Second, we will discuss the meaning and use of prayer for Luther. We will select three specific functions of prayer that are important to him--presence, petition and intercession. We will use them to point out the tension between his inherited scholastic theology as it shaped providence and prayer. Thirdly, we will reformulate his understanding of prayer and develop it further through a Whiteheadian point of view.

Problems of Contemporary Prayer

In considering the problems of prayer in the contemporary situation, several generalizations can be made. The felt importance of prayer seems to be dependent upon the felt importance of God, i.e., God's providential activity. If the presence of God is problematic, prayer also is rendered problematic. It appears to us that prayer is a function of how one understands God. If this is so then the problems which inhere in the classical notion of God as found in Luther (God's aseity) militate against the meaningfulness of prayer for many moderns. If God is understood as complete, self-sufficient, and unaffected by the world, then the importance of prayer would fade, for prayer depends upon how it affects God. Prayer has probably declined in importance in modern Christianity because of the increasing tension that many have felt regarding the classical notion of God.

Because God is all-creative, all-powerful and self-sufficient, prayer makes sense for many only as God commands us to do it. "Prayer, therefore is strictly and solemnly commanded . . . he has not left it to our choice. It is our duty and obligation to pray if we want to be Christians . . . it is based . . . on obedience to God."¹ Consequently, on the one hand many Christians have felt it doesn't make sense to pray (theologically). On the other hand, many feel the need to pray and would like to pray because that lack of a meaningful prayer life has left them spiritually undernourished. A proper conception of God and God's providence would theologically open the possibility for meaningful prayer.

Beyond the specific theological problem of God, many have been unable to pray because the usual understanding and use of prayer has been problematic.² Two main functions of prayer have seemed problematical. Prayer has functioned as if it were informing God of something he didn't already know. The praying Christian informs God of his needs and the needs of others. This is puzzling since God is normally understood as omniscient. If God knows all things including the deepest needs of our hearts and the hearts of others,

¹Paul Althaus, The Theology of Martin Luther (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), p. 132.

²Norman Pittenger, Trying to Be A Christian (Philadelphia: Pilgrim Press, 1972), p. 95.

why the need to inform him of our concerns?

Prayer has also functioned as coercing God to do what he wouldn't otherwise do, to get what we want. If God is omnipotent such badgering is futile, since God will work his will whether we pester him or not. There inheres in these two objections to prayer theological problems regarding the nature of God which we mentioned briefly above. There are also problems in misunderstanding the nature of prayer itself. The above objections to prayer stem from misunderstanding the purpose of prayer by reducing it to the

notion that prayer consists only in petition and intercession . . . leading to the idea that the exercise of prayer itself consists solely in 'asking.' When seen in the proper context, however, prayer is anything but the magic which tries to discover formulae to get one's way in the world.³

As we shall discuss later, the purpose of prayer has wider horizons than this which will lessen the impact of these objections.

There are two other minor objections to prayer which also make it problematic. These are more capable of correction than the above. The first is the complaint, especially among the young, that the language of prayer is archaic and therefore not directly meaningful. The older forms and language which couch prayer is felt to block a more immediate experience of the meaningfulness of prayer in

³Ibid.

contemporary circumstances. Much recent gain has been made to meet these objections. Prayers are much more contemporary in their daily and liturgical use. The other minor objection is the perennial one that prayer is too demanding, is hard to put into practice, and exacts too much time and discipline. This problem is less easily overcome because it is located in the human will, which is all too easily diverted from non-sensual, rigorous concerns.

Luther's Understanding of Prayer

In considering Martin Luther's understanding of prayer we should state at the outset that prayer was very important in his religious life. Though he did not write a theology of prayer, there is a good deal in his writings that suggests the significance of practiced prayer.

"Luther's writings are replete with testimony to his belief in the value and power of prayer."⁴ During his days in the monastery as a young monk, he spent much time in prayer. Much of this prayerful effort was done out of a sense of duty to say the canonical prayers and not out of spontaneity. "Prayer under the papacy was pure torture of the poor conscience and only blabbering and making of words; no

⁴Sister Deanna Marie Carr, "A Consideration of the Meaning of Prayer in the Life of Martin Luther," Concordia Theological Monthly, XLII:9 (October 1971), 620.

praying but a work of obedience."⁵ His negative experience with this kind of prayer was one of the main reasons that he later prayed more simply and freely.

Prayer for Luther was important in feeling the presence of God. He was deeply disturbed by the fact that the revealing God was often so remote and inaccessible. "Luther lived out his life in tension between the hidden and experienced God, longing for the gracious presence, but always threatened by the impending absence."⁶ The hidden and terrifying God was often more real than the revealing and loving God. Because of his many anxieties about God's presence and absence, prayer was not easy for Luther. It was hard work. Nevertheless, he prayed fervently his whole life right up to his death to establish the sense of God's revealedness and love. Prayer became the vehicle whereby contact was made with God.

Because Luther did not write a systematic theology of prayer, there are no ready made categories to use that will explicate the spirit and form of his prayer life. We have selected three categories which seem to emerge from Luther's miscellaneous writings as a way of getting at his

⁵Leonhard Ludwig, "Luther, Man of Prayer," in Fred W. Meuser and Stanley D. Schneider (eds.) Interpreting Luther's Legacy (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1969), p. 164.

⁶Carr, p. 621.

understanding of the function of prayer. These three categories overlap and coalesce. They are not air tight, distinctly separate functions. Yet, they will be useful as we try to organize his understanding of the meaningfulness and use of prayer. They will also provide sufficient insights that illustrate the tensions between Luther's inherited scholastic theology and his religious intentions. Finally, these three categories provide an understanding of prayer that, when set within a Whiteheadian context and developed by it, can provide useful insights into the use of prayer in contemporary religious practice. The three are presence, petition and intercession.

Presence. Our general comments about Luther and prayer imply the category of presence. Luther was deeply dependent upon feeling the presence of God and his forgiving grace. The picture that emerges is one of Luther relating himself to God in a very personal way. "More often this man breaks into prayer as abruptly as someone addressing a friend. He is as one in continued conversation with God. To him the name of God is the presence of God."⁷ Luther needed to feel God's presence and had faith that God would come to him even though he often seemed distant. "Nor was Luther disappointed in his trust. There is ample evidence

⁷Ludwig, p. 165.

that God did not withhold the comfort of his presence, even from the 'vulgar' reformer."⁸

Yet this desire for God's presence was not a mystical absorption in God. The sense of God's presence provided the context whereby God could speak to man and that what God said made a difference in one's life. Prayer was not a one way street whereby only man addressed God. Prayer meant also that God could indeed speak to man and that man could, in turn, both listen and respond. Luther believed that through prayer, the Holy Spirit could inform and impel a man to move and act in certain ways. The response by man to this speaking and leading of the Holy Spirit was one of joyful surrender. Prayer as presence for Luther meant the situation or attitude whereby man speaks and God listens, and whereby God speaks and man listens in joyful surrender. "The Holy Spirit himself preaches in prayer and the words of his sermon is far better than one thousand of our prayers."⁹ All this implies a dialogic relationship between man and God in prayer. Luther speaks to God in prayer "with the trust and hope of one who speaks with his father and friend."¹⁰ To say it differently, prayer, as presence, is the speaking of God to man about his

⁸Carr, p. 622. ⁹Ibid., p. 624.

¹⁰Ludwig, p. 166.

will for men.

Petition. Prayer for Luther can also be considered under the category of petition. Luther is very emphatic about the importance of addressing God with one's requests. Implied in this is that God will listen to the petitions. In a sermon on the catechism, Luther cites Matthew 7:7 ("Ask, and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and it will be opened to you.") as the justification that man must make requests of God. "But God does not despise prayer, but rather has commanded it and promised that he will hear it . . . he wants you to pray and to be confident that you will be heard."¹¹ In this sense of prayer, Luther emphasizes that God commands that men pray even though at times it does not seem appropriate.

Much of Luther's writing on prayer is about petitionary prayer. He defines petition as the "stating [of] what we have at heart, naming the desire we express in prayer and supplication. In the Lord's prayer are seven petitions besides prayer proper."¹² Petitionary prayer is not the recitation of empty prayers from prayer books or the counting of beads. It is an earnest request from the heart

¹¹John Dillenberger, Martin Luther (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1961), p. 217.

¹²Martin Luther, A Compend of Luther's Theology (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1943), p. 106.

of man to God, that he will grant the request or offer something better. There is the confidence that the prayer is heard by God though the request may not be granted in the form in which it was requested. God is to be trusted. Luther felt that such prayer was to be done without ceasing. "Men ought always to pray, and never cease."¹³ Men are to be in a constant state of prayer.

Luther even goes so far as to say that petitions to God are the art of persistent pleading. There is no reluctance to address God for every need and no inclination to do it meekly.

Here the evangelist teaches us the real art of begging, teaches us to be positively obstructive, unabashed, and endlessly persistent before God. For he who is timid soon permits himself to be turned away and is not fit for begging. We must shed all shyness and consider that our Lord God wants to have us urge and persevere. For to give much is his delight and glory, and He is pleased if we expect much good from Him.¹⁴

Intercession. Finally, the category of intercession is closely related to petition, but more directly focuses upon prayer offered for another in the hope that it will have an influence upon God. Luther sees prayer as a social exercise. "Let no one among us seek his own things and forget before Thee those of others." Luther regards prayer

¹³Ibid., p. 109.

¹⁴Martin Luther, What Luther Says (St. Louis: Concordia, 1959), p. 1089.

as an efficacious force with a multiplicity of social significances."¹⁵ His own prayer life exhibits this. "His personal and pastoral prayers remembered the sick, the dying, the anxious, the despondent, the perplexed and the doubting, the bereaved, the persecuted and the imprisoned."¹⁶

Luther speaks as if the prayers for others make a real difference in the scheme of things. He implies that there is a real effect upon God; that such prayers are efficacious. Says Luther: "But this is given through the channel of another's intercession, as in the gospel Christ raised the widow's son at Nain because of the prayers of his mother apart from the faith of the son."¹⁷ Such prayer is vital as it shapes the Christian sense of a loving God who commands that men pray, who promises that they will be heard and answered.

Prayer, then, for Luther was a very meaningful experience, especially when understood as presence, petition and intercession. It was for him a central mystery in the life of the Christian community.¹⁸

¹⁵Carr, p. 626.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Martin Luther, Luther's Works (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1958), XLIII, 250.

¹⁸Carr, p. 627.

Tension Between Theology and Prayer. The above discussion implies several things about prayer and how it is related to God. Implied especially are some tensions similar to ones which we discussed in Chapters 2 and 3 in considering Luther's understanding of providence and his inherited scholastic theology. Let us consider some of these tensions as they appear in Luther's understanding of prayer.

He implies that prayer is important in relating God to man and man to God. Prayer, in a sense, is a "comforting, reassuring 'we-Thou' relationship."¹⁹ Luther speaks to God in a personal way as a son to a father. This speaking to God occurs in the context that God is an "oven full of love" and that he wishes such communication to occur. In prayer, God also speaks to man, informing and directing those who are open to him and surrender their wills to Him. There is in a real sense a relationship between man and God that is presupposed by and included in prayer.

Also, petitionary and intercessory prayer imply that God hears and is affected by the prayers offered to him. In a sense the prayers seem to make a difference in the world. They appear to have an effect upon God as he works his will in the world. Luther does not quite understand how this can be so. For him prayer and the effect it has upon God

¹⁹Ibid.

remains a mystery. In the last analysis we pray because God commands it and because we receive real benefits from it.

However, the religious sensitivity that Luther has about this relationship between man and God and about the effect upon God is in tension with his understanding of the nature of God, which he received from scholastic theology. In a strict sense God cannot meaningfully be related to man in prayer because God's impassibility precludes that he can be related at all. God, complete in himself, does not need men and cannot be affected by them. The "we-Thou" relationship which Luther implies inheres in prayer, cannot be supported by his understanding of God's aseity.

Nor can prayers of petition and intercession really make a difference or affect him if he is all-determinative. That is, such prayers really have no efficacy upon God if he has already decided how he alone will act. Prayers can not be a part of the causal process because only God is causally efficacious. The intensity of Luther's religious sense that petition and intercession really matter is undermined by the fact that they have no effect upon God in a strict sense. And if they make no difference to God, such prayer is rendered meaningless. Luther himself emphasized the fact that we are commanded to pray in addition to the fact that he existentially felt the need to pray. It would seem, then, that if prayer is to be meaningful as it was sensed and intended by Luther, there

needs to be a theological reformulation of God and God's providence that enables God to be related to men and to be affected by them, as through their prayers.

Reformulation and Development of Luther's Understanding of Prayer

Such a reformulation of providence that includes Luther's religious sense of God's love as related to the world was considered in Chapter 3. We will briefly summarize our conclusions that a Whiteheadian framework offers a fulfilling context for Luther's religious concerns, such as his strong sense of the meaning and efficacy of prayer. We will then see how several current thinkers develop in a contemporary way religious meaning of prayer as set forth by Luther. The categories of presence, petition and intercession will again help us organize our discussion.

Chapter 3 discussed a Whiteheadian view of God and God's providence and compared this with the view of Martin Luther. In Whitehead's formulation we saw that God was a God whose providential activity is related to the world in a metaphysical way. He is related by the offering of the initial aim to the actual entities which is its ideal aim in actualizing itself. We saw that God orders the eternal objects in a way that is relevant to the situation of the becoming actual entity. We saw that God is related by his

prehension and preservation of the world of actual entities. And we saw this as contributing to the divine character and purpose. God and the world are related in that the world is dependent upon God for its becoming and God is dependent on the world for his becoming. God and the world need each other.

We concluded that this view of God's providence was a more adequate formulation for the contemporary theological situation than Luther's. That does not discount Luther's religious insights into and profound sense of God's activity in the world. It does improve upon the apparent inconsistency between a God pro me (related) and the medieval doctrine of God's aseity which connotes unrelatedness, self-sufficiency and all-inclusive creativity and power. Thus, we can say that prayer can be meaningful if we so understand God to be metaphysically related to the world in a meaningful way. Also, prayers have an effect upon God in that they are part of the data prehended from the world which God uses in ordering future possibilities. The effect upon God of prayer is meaningful and the need for its practice self-evident.

Let us consider how several recent thinkers develop in a Whiteheadian mode the religious insights of Luther regarding prayer. First, we will consider the question of God's presence in the world and the sense of communion with him in prayer. This is the background for knowing and

conforming to God's will. God is God, the sovereign, holy, loving creator, and he is full of splendor, beauty, mystery, and worthy of adoration. God's love is great and his will is the embodiment of goodness. He is related to man, especially as revealed in Jesus Christ. Prayer is "the simple immediacy of God in the soul"²⁰ . . . the life of God joined to man."²¹ The practice of prayer is the process whereby man experiences God's mysterious presence in relationship. Man experiences himself to be dependent and the attitude of humility is important for the prayer life. The goal of prayer is "the full life through a spontaneous affirmation of existence in God's world,"²² and the existence of God in the world. This presence of God forms the background in the types and stages of prayer, i.e., adoration, confession, petition, commitment, thanksgiving, and communion.

From a Whiteheadian point of view, God is the creator of all actual entities in the sense that he is the decisive factor that a new occasion occurs at all. The occasion itself, "causa sui," determines how it will constitute itself. We are dependent on God the creator as

²⁰John Magee, Reality and Prayer (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1957), p. 37.

²¹Ibid., p. 214.

²²Ibid., p. 84.

the "ground of our being."²³ God offers to every occasion its ideal aim and possibility for its self-actualization, called the initial aim. The initial aim is the basis of the occasion achieving social and personal order. God is experienced, then, as the "ground of being, the ground of purpose, and the ground of order."²⁴ Human experience is dependent upon God as he functions in these ways. Yet, the experience of God's presence in prayer does not necessarily imply conscious awareness of him. We do experience our existence as given, but this experience does not self-evidently reveal God as the giver; it is not even a necessarily religious experience. The religious believer does experience this givenness as a gift derived from God. This religious experience is fully allowed within the Whiteheadian vision of reality.

We have said God's presence is not usually experienced consciously in prayer and never consciously through the initial aim. Christians believe, nevertheless, that God is present as the creator of their lives. We said above that the believer knows himself as known, loved and preserved by God. This adds to the importance of man's response to God's offering of the initial aim. In Luther's

²³John B. Cobb, Jr., A Christian Natural Theology (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965), p. 226.

²⁴Ibid., p. 227.

understanding, it is being impelled by the speaking of the Holy Spirit. It means that it makes a difference to ourselves and God how the satisfaction of the occasion conforms to God's ideal possibility. The conformity contributes to the rightness of things as realized in God. While the initial aim is not conscious, the conscious belief that it is important to be open to it and conform as closely as possible to it has positive consequences which increasingly allows ideal possibilities to be realized. In this desire to be open, the will of man can more nearly approximate the will of God. There is a principle of guidance (God's providence) which operates and is not subject to the limits of understanding. "Men are instruments of purposes they do not comprehend."²⁵ Such conformity of man's will to God's will is not easy, for it depends upon the receptivity and responsiveness of man. The task requires discrimination between the initial aim given by God from the other aims inherited from the past. The presence of God in prayer is the context wherein we discern the aim (will) of God.

Prayer, then, is the gradual process of tuning oneself in to the nearness and presence of God in his love, though dimly experienced. The thought of God is not far from the surface of consciousness. It is "prayer without ceasing." In daily disciplined prayer, "the thought of God

²⁵Ibid., p. 251.

is never absent from at least one of the many layers of consciousness, and throughout the day, either as conscious act or as a background of awareness"26 Continual daily prayer is a refining of every thought and feeling to God and a realization "that the holy, as Paul Tillich teaches, is a dimension in everything real, not a section within reality."27 The life of prayer is "the life of God joined to man" in the sense that God's will becomes operative in the will of man. The point of prayer and Christian living is "the intentional and attentive identification of our feeble human willing, purposing, and aspiring, as God's enormous loving care and activity."28 At the heart of prayer is the "abandonment or absolute surrender to divine providence."29 God's activity among persons is the working of his will through human will. The person is not an automaton devoid of freedom, despite the language about surrender and abandonment of self. People are dependent upon God's will and need to appropriate it through the disciplined practice of prayer. As Jesus said, "Not my will, but thine be done." The human will attempts to conform itself to God's will. It is the process whereby "two wills, the will of God and the will of the soul are

²⁶Magee, p. 210.

²⁷Ibid., p. 214.

²⁸Pittenger, p. 95.

²⁹Ibid., p. 111.

conformed together . . ."³⁰ There is a purification of self and a clarity about human need. This is very close to the spirit of Luther's understanding of prayer. Belief that God experiences man, a belief allowed for in the metaphysical scheme of Whitehead and discussed in Chapter 2, has important religious consequences for petitionary prayer. Whitehead certainly affirmed that God knows the world by his consequent nature.

The religious belief that he is known and loved and preserved by God "is of supreme existential and religious importance."³¹ This belief implies that God hears the petitions we make in our prayers and is affected. The God we experience through religious belief is the one who is radically near and the one who hears our prayers. The hearing of our prayers by God affects the way he prehends the world and the way he orders future possibilities.

Such a metaphysical scheme enables one to take very seriously Luther's sense of pleading and begging with God. "God is 'changed' precisely in that through his relationship with the world, he is given further opportunities to create greater good and to implement such good as is already there. Opportunity, in such ways, would not be available to him without the consentient acceptance which the world can give

³⁰Ibid., p. 203.

³¹Cobb, p. 244.

to him . . ."³² God uses the good desires men offer him to accomplish his purpose.

Petitionary prayer enables us to purify our desires, and in offering them to God, helps us to be "co-creators" with God in mysterious ways. It enables us to cooperate with God in his bringing novelty into the world. It is the highest form of creativity because it is "the integration of man, nature and God in the most inclusive and perfect whole, God-united-to-His-creation."³³ Prayer is identification with God's relationship to the world in his continuing creation. It is "participation in his creative work which leads "toward greater harmony, beauty, integration, richness, freedom in order, and wholeness."³⁴

Because intercessory prayer is much like petitionary prayer, it follows that it has a valid function within a Whiteheadian context. Luther felt that prayer was important in its social dimensions in bringing the community of faith closer together. This is an important function of intercessory prayer. In praying for someone else, we have a kind of copresence in God. In his Being we are intimately connected and have true relationship with one another.

³²Norman Pittenger, God's Way With Men (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1969), p. 153.

³³Magee, p. 123.

³⁴Ibid., p. 122.

Whitehead criticized the Newtonian idea that physical objects have a definite and isolated place in absolute space. Whitehead's idea was instead that physical objects are defined as fields of force within larger fields of force. Thus, "every particle of matter is affected by every other particle throughout the entire reach of space-time."³⁵ The point of this for intercessory prayer is that there is a basis to speak with conviction of human unity from which the life of intercession springs. Luther's social sense of prayer is vindicated by such contemporary reflection from the sciences.

In this chapter we indicated the religious importance of prayer in the life of Luther. We saw that via the categories of presence, petition and intercession, he has a very strong sense of the relationship between man and God in the life of prayer. We saw that Luther believed in the importance of listening to God speak to him. Also, we saw that prayer of petition and intercession implies that God hears the prayers and is affected by them. There is a tension between this and his received scholastic understanding of God's aseity. A Whiteheadian context was then provided that enabled God to be related to the world so as to preserve Luther's intentions regarding the importance of prayer. We also discussed how the concerns of Luther

³⁵Ibid., p. 146.

regarding prayer were affirmed and developed in a contemporary Whiteheadian way.

Chapter 5

CONCLUSION

Purpose of Chapter

Thus far we have discussed providence and prayer as it has functioned for Luther and how the theological tensions in his theology can be mitigated in a Whiteheadian context while still preserving his basic religious intentions. In this chapter we shall draw some brief implications from the foregoing discussion for the minister, especially as it relates to prayer.

Prayer and the Minister

The minister as a person and a professional has many religious needs similar to those of his parishioners. The potential meaning and use of prayer by him is especially important to him as he seeks to help and lead others in the Christian life. Many of the uses of prayer for him are public, such as in the priestly prayers of worship or in leading others in public prayer in situations like growth groups. But prayer is also vital to the minister as he, like other Christians, tries to sense the presence of God and God's will in private prayer. It is our conviction that prayer can be a useful vehicle in sensing God's providence

and will for men's lives. In Chapter 3 we discussed prayer as presence of God with man. Here, too, we will focus upon the use of prayer as presence in meeting some of the needs of ministers. We will touch only briefly upon petition and intercession. The chapter will conclude with a summary of the dissertation.

John Magee believes firmly in the use of prayer to preserve and invigorate the Church and its spiritual leaders. The priestly, prophetic, and reconciling functions of ministry draw their power from deep faith which comes from adoration and confession. The horizons for the future are expanded as when "in deep prayer the prophet is overshadowed by a vision of what is to come, as though he were suddenly set squarely into the stream of time and knew its currents and directions."¹ Religious leaders, as well as the Church, are enriched by prayer and are enabled to live amidst the tensions of modern times:

The man of prayer is able to stand alone. . . . to stand with others and to give and receive love freely without guilt . . . to see his own work as God's calling . . . to be the instrument of the creative, loving, self-giving Will of God."²

Magee believes firmly that prayer can also become a normal event in our scientifically technological society.

¹John B. Magee, Reality and Power (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1957), pp. 4-5.

²Ibid., pp. 8-10.

The methods and beliefs of science themselves demonstrate close parallels between the creative powers of scientific thinking and the spiritual life: in fact, the latter may presuppose the former. As Magee states:

This survey makes clear the need of science for the spiritual renewal which can come through profound prayer; an experience of spiritual immediacy which restores depth to reason; recaptures glimpses of beauty, truth and goodness to refresh the roots of inquiry; . . . and restores the whole man to his place in a holy universe.³

Prayer can have a powerful impact upon the Church and its ministers, and in turn upon the creative powers of a culture as manifest in science.

Prayer as Presence. Ministers very often feel fragmented in their ministry because of the many dimensions in which they operate. They often feel that clarity about God's will is lacking, and hence feel anxious about whether or not their plethora of activities really involves God. On the other hand, many ministers live out of an understanding of God's will that is a relic of times past. It is not a reflection of God's current activity and presence. Disciplined prayer seems to offer the potential to come into closer communion with God and to gain a more refined sense of God's will. It also has the potential to break the mold of the past experience of God's will and to freshen and

³Ibid., p. 29.

revitalize a present sense of God's presence and will. Especially important would be the recovery of the sense of life as whole and holy beyond the trivialities and tensions.

Magee's insights into prayer and its use for ministers is exemplified in George Bernanos' novel, The Diary of a Country Priest, and serves as a useful transition to the consideration of the use of prayer in ministry. It is a story about a young priest who tries to sense the activity of God in his life in a humble, rural French village. He goes about his tasks with loving concern for nature and for his parishioners.

Yet, he feels that he isn't accomplishing much that is useful in his ministry. Many small failures and the feelings of inferiority beset him. At times he finds the act of praying difficult, and at times impossible, as he tries to sense the presence of God working through his life. He tries to discipline himself that the thought of God's presence might not be far from him, and that he might be open to God's working through him. Yet God often seems distant to him in prayer.

At one point in the novel, he goes to a chateau to visit a rich woman about her daughter. He feels totally cowardly and inadequate to do this. He expects that he will not be of any real benefit to her. "Usually my dominant

feeling is that of the powerlessness of us all."⁴ They start talking. To his surprise, he speaks honestly, forthrightly and with compassion. When she challenges, he doesn't budge. They talk and talk with the woman finally pouring out her heart in confession. Through her encounter with him she finally felt that God's Kingdom had come to her. The young priest is so surprised by his bold behavior that "the words I had just said astounded me. They were far removed from what I had been thinking fifteen minutes earlier . . . for some time now I have had the impression that my mere presence will draw out sin . . ."⁵ It seemed that the priest, as inadequate as he felt himself to be, was open to God's will in such a way that God was working in and through him, directing the priest. The novel seems to talk of the great risk required to live by faith in God's providential activity. Also, that while God at times is silent in the relationship of prayer, he later lures in unexpected ways.

The way prayer functioned for the country priest as a sensitization to God's presence and his leading is an important insight for contemporary ministry.

Prayer as presence is useful in enabling the

⁴George Bernanos, The Diary of A Country Priest (London: Collins Clear-Type Press, 1937), p. 127.

⁵Ibid., pp. 130-131.

minister himself to draw near to God's presence and to attempt to discriminate and conform to God's will. Magee talks about using prayer to acquire the feeling that God is a dimension of everything real. This is taking on the "mind of Christ." Through prayer, conformity by a minister to God's will, will make a difference in the ministry. As Magee says, he will be able "to stand with others and to give and receive love freely without guilt." Prayer can have an effect in the daily contacts with people that a minister has. But perhaps this is more by indirection than by directly praying with people. It applies to ministry in all its roles when Magee states, "the only thing that ever counts is to be the instrument of the creative, loving, self-giving will of God. Everything else becomes sheer futility."⁶

The usefulness of prayer for the minister as pastor need not mean that one should visibly pray all the time or that all visits with people require that a prayer be said. Some situations and people actually do not require that a prayer be said. Some situations and people actually do not require prayer as a vehicle to point to God's presence and activity. The country priest did not pray with the rich lady during the most dramatic moments of their discussion. Instead, he talked with her honestly, firmly, yet

⁶Magee, p. 10.

sympathetically. The presence and activity of God can break through a minister who has himself been involved in prayer as a way for God to be near the surface, working his will through the conformity of man's will with God.

The minister as prophet obtains his vision and courage from the deep certainty of faith which comes through spiritual disciplines such as prayer. "To be rooted in a constant awareness of God makes one unafraid of the world. Such rootage nourished the ability to endure and to promote needed change."⁷ During the social movements of the sixties, rootage in spiritual disciplines was forgotten. The truncation of the prophetic and the spiritual led to a slackening of the prophetic in the seventies. This was not the only reason for the demise of Christian social involvement, but certainly it was an important one.

The prophetic role in ministry needs the support of prayers that first sets the context of God's providence, i.e., his loving efficaciousness as the source of order and novelty. The experience of God's present involvement with and leading of men through prayer as presence helps to sensitize ministers that God is in fact calling them in some way to do his work in the world, to be co-creators with him. These prayers which lift this up enable the prophetic word to be spoken and to be heard with more openness and

⁷Ibid., p. 3.

awareness. Prayer helps ministers sense that God is at work changing, redeeming, preserving.

Petitionary Prayer. Next let us discuss prayer as it relates to ministers. Ministers, as Christians, may share with other Christians the feeling that petitionary prayer is problematical. However, this form of prayer may present problems unique to him as a minister. We will discuss these problems emerging from his professional perspective as shaping the way in which petitionary prayer can be meaningfully affirmed. We will then explicate our positive understanding of this mode of prayer.

First, a minister's theological education may present important problems. He is sensitized to the theological issues surrounding an understanding of God's nature and relationship to the world. The tension of an absolute God who is related to the world, as we have discussed in this dissertation, has tended to undermine the importance of prayer. This is more heightened for the minister than for the layman, whose intuitions may be vague, because the tension is lifted to the reflective level. There may not appear to be any theological reformulation to ease the tension. The classical understanding of God becomes somewhat suspect and confusion about God may result. No coherent vision of God replaces the more traditional formulations. There is then no compelling image of the God

to whom one is making requests. The religious sensibility of God's activity remains, but the understanding is confused. A corollary of this is that petitionary prayer implies for many ministers that God alone has freedom in the world. This theological affirmation tends to contradict a personal sense of freedom in and responsibility for the world. This also tends to minimize the importance of petitionary prayer.

The second problem is implied in the last part of the previous paragraph. Many ministers, because of their sense of personal freedom and responsibility, have adopted socially active styles of ministry. Ministers have felt that they must be in the vanguard of changing the social structures which will in turn, foster more fully human existence. Energy and focus has occurred in such areas as race relations, the anti-war movement, and the ecological movement. Prayer to God that he might change the social structures has had secondary importance. The belief is that God works to change external realities through the church, beginning with the clergy. Many ministers have consequently neglected their own spiritual formation and that of their parishioners which has historically been understood to be the ground of ethical concern and action. This has encouraged attention upon spiritual experiences and disciplines such as prayer. There has been a realization that involving God through petitionary prayer may have a place in

identifying real social needs and in acquiring direction and energy to act.

A third problem for ministers regarding petitionary prayer is that their busy lives of service militate against taking the time for petitionary prayer to refine their own personal sense of need. Though this is true for many contemporary Christians, it especially applies to ministers because they spend a great deal of time involved with the deep needs of others. When they cursorily compare their personal needs with the more serious ones of others with whom they work, it is not always self-evident that they need to focus upon their own needs via petitionary prayer. The time is better spent on others' matters, especially with others. The edge of their own needs is dulled by those of others. Another way of saying this is that self-sacrifice and service make them feel that the needs they do feel are not all that important. Christian ministers live for service to others. Over the long run, their neglect of their personal needs in petitionary prayer causes them to lose touch with part of their deeper yearnings and how they correlate with God's will. They lose touch with themselves, and their psychological and spiritual equilibrium becomes unbalanced. As psychoanalysis has shown, repression can have serious consequences.

Fourthly, ministers who minimize the importance of petitionary prayer have cut themselves off from an important

source of creativity, i.e., God's creativity. Many ministers have felt the lack of creative, spiritual power. This is certainly associated with prayer as presence and the openness to the will of God. It is specifically an aspect of petitionary prayer in that the lack of creative power is related to the absence of opening oneself to God's leading regarding specifically felt and expressed problems and needs, such as sickness.

These problems for the minister regarding petitionary prayer can be alleviated in important, though not complete, ways when addressed by understandings which we have developed in this dissertation. The problem of the absolute God who can be affected, as in petitionary prayer, have been discussed in detail in chapters 2, 3, and 4. If theological education heightens the tension for ministers, it also can sensitize the minister and enhance his receptivity to the philosophical and theological insights of Whitehead. We have asserted that the Whiteheadian vision allows for God to be affected by petitionary prayers. We have said that God's providence can be understood in vital new ways. God's providence is in part "shaped" by the way in which man responds to God's will, proffered in the initial aim. Petitionary prayer is meaningful when it is affirmed that it makes a difference to God and in his activity. As Pittenger states, "When earnest prayer is made to God about this or that person or cause or situation, God

then takes account of it . . . God receives and then uses the good desires which men offer to him."⁸ Elsewhere he states, "Our human activity makes a difference in the way things go on; our prayers do the same. Otherwise all petitionary and intercessory prayer is absurd and irrelevant."⁹ This allows for human freedom and encourages petitionary prayer as a free response to God's activity toward man.

Petitionary prayer has the potential to restore the basis to social activism. It need not be an either/or choice between personal piety and social involvement. This form of prayer has the potential to restore a clearer sense of the needs of society that require human effort, for at the heart of petitionary prayer is the refinement of need and the source of energy to act. "It will mean that more and more our desires will become one with God's passionate desire for good; our requests will be according to his will . . ."¹⁰

Petitionary prayer as refinement of need is clarified in discussing how it can function in the minister's personal life. We stated that often ministers

⁸Norman Pittenger, God's Way With Men (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1969), p. 156.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 160.

neglect their own needs in prayer because the needs of others seem more important. In some cases, personal needs are denied and repressed because it is thought that for a servant of others personal needs are of minor importance. The sense of sin is probably felt and this is confessed to God in prayers of repentance which seek forgiveness. But the personal needs are not lifted up to God beyond confession.

Yet, this self-denial, rather than being magnanimous, has serious long-run consequences in that the minister, as the man for others, may experience disequilibrium in his personal life. His personal life may become out of joint. The repressed needs may come out in pathological and socially dysfunctional ways. Petitionary prayer is important because ministers as servants need to get in touch with their needs instead of denying them. As Magee states, "But the truth is that God wants us to come before him with our deepest longings, and being human, we cannot do otherwise."¹¹ Ministers who come to God with their deepest needs, can experience a sense of personal understanding and purification. "The Christ, however, bids us not to quench our desire, but rather to purify it and then offer it to God."¹² Such purification enables the minister to more fully be the servant of others. His sense of

¹¹Magee, p. 127.

¹²Ibid., p. 127.

mission and service can be more closely aligned with the will of God. His needs, rather than repressed and blocking meaningful interaction with others, are aligned with those of God's in more effective ministry. He also realizes himself to be fully human with all the yearning qualities that others possess. This enables him to identify with others as they undergo the process of struggle in learning to cope with their own needs. As an aside, it might be remembered from Chapter 4 that Martin Luther believed petitionary prayer to be an important way of spiritual growth. Luther needed to make his desires known to God for its neglect allowed his psyche to become disordered.

Finally, petitionary prayer can be a source of spiritual creativity to the minister. This is more easy to affirm than to describe and characterize. Magee asserts that "petition is a form of participation with Him in loving creativity. He shares His mysterious powers with us by joining our deepest desires and longings to Him in prayer."¹³ He cites examples of cases where God's creative healing has taken place due to the petitionary prayer. It is possible to affirm this as part of God's creative activity. Openness to it can have significance, but healing treads on the dangerous waters of magic and savior-complexes which need to be avoided in their extreme forms. Magee is

¹³Ibid., p. 115.

also correct in affirming that human creativity, as in the arts and sciences, can result from participating in the creative work of God through prayer. This is not to say all great scientists and artists are necessarily religious people who rely on prayer. It does mean that a minister can live on the growing edge of the universe "where the future is coming into existence . . . Prayer is identification with the creativity of God."¹⁴

Intercessory Prayer. Finally, we need to discuss intercessory prayer and the minister, considering the peculiar problems and ways of overcoming the problems as drawn from our previous discussion. One problem regarding intercessory prayer follows from our earlier discussion of the activist style of many ministers. The focus of attention and activity upon the social structures as a way to help and serve others, has often led to the neglect of people as human persons with deep spiritual and psychological needs. The minister's role as pastor has been weakened by excessive social focus. Such focus has led to interpersonal desensitization. The neglect of the personal loving and caring role of the "pastor" has weakened the church as a loving and caring community. Again, this is not an either/or choice. Involvement in social change has not

¹⁴Ibid., p. 124.

always been informed by the needs of people as derived from close interpersonal relationships.

A second problem regarding intercession is closely related to this. Ministers often fail to see an individual as a whole person because of the differences of politics, personality, education. The minister can also feel separated from his people because they see him as different, by the sheer fact of his ordination. The minister is "more holy." Separation, whatever the cause, makes the minister see himself as ineffectual in meeting the needs of his people. He feels that it is difficult for him to overcome the separation to meaningfully affect his people. He desires to have an effect upon them as whole people. He wishes to get beyond the skewed, fragmented perception of others to relate to their whole persons.

A third problem is that the multi-emotional dimensions of ministry make it hard to constantly relate to people in appropriate ways. One of the challenges of a minister is that he operates on so many different emotional levels in a given day. He may go from administrative functions to the deathbed of a child to sermon preparation, to visiting a first-time mother in the hospital, to marriage counseling, to a civil rights meeting, all in a short period of time. It is difficult to empathetically share in another's problems in an appropriate way when the emotional shifts occur so often. It is hard to share with another on

his level of pain or joy when coming into the situation with a different emotional set. Many ministers who want to empathetically share with others find it difficult to generate this from within themselves. They feel themselves to fall short of the empathetic example of Christ.

A fourth problem is that ministers, when they do focus upon and share in the problems of others, abdicate their unique perspective and contribution to other perspectives. The minister often tends to deal with people's needs within psychological or sociological frameworks alone. At times this is necessary and important. But the problem is that often the value of the spiritual dimension is left out entirely. In counseling, for example, the minister may deal with a person only as a psychological being, when in fact the person needs to be put in touch with the more wholistic and profound dimension of spiritual existence. The minister, feels more confident in manipulating psychological jargon than in creating a loving and therapeutic climate by praying for his parishioner. Hence, it may seem more important to run psychological growth groups than to intercede for someone else. He trusts more the visible psychological effect he has upon another person in counseling than in prayer. Yet the minister often feels psychology is not always sufficient. He feels he might affect others in more wholistic and penetrating ways.

These problems can be meaningfully addressed by

discussing intercessory prayer as set within the context of our previous discussions. Intercessory prayer has the potential to enable ministers to focus upon the real concerns of persons alongside social involvement. Praying for others helps to foster a humanizing influence upon changing the social structures which serve people. Intercession enables the minister to shape his action with real people and their needs in mind.

This is sharpened and developed by understanding the value of intercessory prayer in drawing people closer together in spite of their differences. It creates a climate of interpersonal loving and caring which is at the heart of the gospel message and which is so important in professional ministry. "Intercession I understand best as an expression of caring about the well-being of another (or others). Its context is an attitude of love which sees all persons (and all creation) as diverse expressions of the wisdom and power of God."¹⁵ Christian love for others in the past has often been expressed by intercessory prayer. It enables people to develop a sense of relatedness with each other. It is rendered more meaningful by a metaphysical vision like Whitehead's in which reality is perceived to be interdependent and interacting networks of

¹⁵Frank Kimper, "Musings on the Dynamics of Praying" (mimeographed), p. 1.

relations between entities. The vision of Whitehead allows for intercessory prayer to have an influence upon God. It also allows for the fact that people can feel bound up with one another and even influence one another directly in prayer. Parapsychological projections toward others can affect them directly.¹⁶ We will develop this more later.

This form of prayer helps ministers overcome the idea that differences between them and their people really separate them. It enables them to affirm that "we belong to one another in God and that our separateness, not our individuality, is somehow an illusion created by sin and ignorance."¹⁷ Intercession helps ministers feel related to their parishioners in a fresh way. There is a sense that because men are related, there is a copresence in God. The love developed and expressed in intercession "can overcome alienation, and this is the concern of intercession: to establish a love relation, or to restore it; and to eliminate in the process whatever symptoms of alienation are apparent in the person . . ."¹⁸ It helps to develop a greater ability to empathize in many ways with others. This empathy is generated from resources of the self and from the

¹⁶Mark C. Thompson, "Prayer and Psychic Phenomena," (mimeographed).

¹⁷Magee, p. 147.

¹⁸Kimper, p. 2.

working of God. The interrelatedness of people can be expressed as dynamic fields of force, interpenetrating, and interacting with each other. Intercession helps one to have an attitude that is open to others' emotional and spiritual needs. The minister is able to understand more in its depth and diversity the needs of others as he develops personal sensitivity to need. As Magee states, "But when love deepens us, the needs of others become mixed up with our own being . . ."¹⁹

Bound up with this is the effect of intercessory prayer upon others. Parapsychological evidence seems to indicate that there are causal influences between people who are separated from each other in space. "We are apparently in touch telepathically with other minds all the time, even when we are unaware of it."²⁰ This implies that intercession not only affects and influences God, but it also can directly affect and influence other persons. Such interpenetrating influence enables the minister to understand his relationship with and effect upon his parishioners in vital new ways. Cobb's comments take on important meaning: "If we do, as I believe, affect each other by what we are and feel as well as by our overt actions and words, then we can help one another to be open and receptive,

¹⁹Magee, p. 151.

²⁰Ibid., p. 147.

loving and free, and for these ends at least we can 'intercede.'"²¹ The minister can have an important spiritual effect upon counselees beyond the psychological. He can create a climate for loving empathetic relationships that has a real effect upon people and their needs. The minister does not feel the need to abdicate the spiritual realm and embrace psychology to feel effective. Rather, through intercessory prayer: he deepens his sense of the personal needs of others; he is able to feel lovingly related to others; he has a greater capacity for empathetic sharing with others; and he can have a real effect upon others in unique, spiritual ways.

Summary

Let us now briefly summarize the arguments we have made in this dissertation. In Chapter 1, we defined providence, based on its meaning in Christian history, as God's relationship to the world as efficacious love, the source of order and novelty.

Chapter 2 discussed providence as it functioned for Martin Luther in his theology. We saw that soteriology, i.e., righteousness before God, was his major concern. We discussed his desire that the loving God be sufficiently

²¹John B. Cobb, Jr., "Disciplined Response to God" (unpublished manuscript), p. 16.

powerful to guarantee salvation. Luther's understanding of God's power and aseity was inherited from scholastic theology, and this was in tension with his religious sense of God's loving providence, his relationship to and in the world; God before man and man before God.

Chapter 3 focused on the Whiteheadian understanding of God and God's providence. There we indicated that God, for Whitehead, is metaphysically related to the world in a meaningful way. We saw that God provides the initial aim in such a way as to be the loving creator of the world without violating the freedom of actual entities. What happens in the world makes a difference to God because of his prehension of the world. This seemed to provide a more satisfying theological context for preserving the religious sensitivities of Luther that God is related to the world.

Chapter 4 explicated the meaning of prayer for Martin Luther and how this was in tension with his received theology. Luther believed that prayer was a dialogic relationship in which God was present to speak to men. Petitionary and intercessory prayer implied that prayer made a difference to God, that he was affected. We then showed that the Whiteheadian understanding of providence and prayer provided a fulfilling context whereby prayer could be understood and be further developed.

In Chapter 5 several implications regarding prayer were discussed as they related to professional ministry.

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